

MAX VERSTAPPEN 2021 F1 WORLD CHAMPION

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“UNBELIEVABLE!”

Verstappen defeats Hamilton on final lap of sensational and controversial Abu Dhabi finale

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Typical F1 2021 controversy and drama – but a worthy champ

The Formula 1 title-deciding Abu Dhabi Grand Prix was the season in a microcosm. We had wheel-to-wheel battling, track-limits drama, the pendulum between Max Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton swinging back and forth – and some baffling decisions from those running the race.

Verstappen's lunge on the first lap was borderline. Too much? Let's call it marginal. Did Hamilton give back enough of the advantage he'd gained by avoiding a crash and going across the runoff? Let's call that marginal, too. So, though initially surprising, the call to leave them as they were was probably the correct one.

The race turned on the final safety car period. Or rather, how it ended. The apparent indecision, followed by the race swiftly going green after only the cars between Hamilton and Verstappen had been waved by, raised serious questions. Yes, fans wanted to see the GP finish with racing, not behind the safety car, but were FIA rules broken to do so?

There clearly needs to be some reform of F1 race direction, and Michael Masi is now in a vulnerable position. But for the good of the sport, perhaps it's time for Mercedes to accept that things didn't go its way in this rollercoaster season, and move on to 2022.

Verstappen and Hamilton would both have been worthy 2021 champions. But the Red Bull ace won it on track with a pass seen by millions. That's much better than it being decided in a room weeks later. Congratulations to Max Verstappen, 2021 world champion.



Kevin Turner

Kevin Turner
Chief Editor

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**NEXT WEEK
23-30 DECEMBER**

F1 review and double issue
Our in-depth look at
an amazing season,
and much more



COVER IMAGES
Jebreili/Red Bull

PIT & Paddock

- 4 Merc appeal throws F1 title in doubt
- 7 Peugeot Hypercar has maiden run
- 8 Cammish secures BTCC return in Ford
- 9 Opinion: Alex Kalinauckas
- 10 Obituary: Al Unser
- 12 Feedback: your letters

RACE CENTRE

- 14 Abu Dhabi GP report and analysis
- 30 World of Sport: FIA Formula 2

INSIGHT



TOP 50 DRIVERS OF 2021

- 35 Autosport's top 50 drivers of 2021
- 62 The four drivers battling for £200,000

CLUB AUTOSPORT

- 73 De Sadeleer prepares for Dakar bid
- 74 More British F4 details revealed
- 76 Vee title contender to swap chassis

FINISHING STRAIGHT

- 78 What's on this week
- 80 From the archive: 1969 Spanish GP
- 82 Next week's Autosport

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER

- 24 Special deals for Autosport

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Hamilton can scarcely believe what has happened on the final lap of the Abu Dhabi GP

COATES



F1 WAITS ON MERCEDES APPEAL AGAINST RESTART

FORMULA 1

Mercedes was still evaluating an appeal against the result of last Sunday's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix as Autosport closed for press, after stewards dismissed its protests against the controversial restart of the Formula 1 title decider.

Lewis Hamilton lost the world championship after being passed by Max Verstappen on the final lap. The move was set up by race director Michael Masi opting to restart the race for a single lap following a safety car period, during which Verstappen had pitted his Red Bull for a new set of soft tyres, while Hamilton's Mercedes was on an ageing set of hard Pirellis.

Masi had originally said that lapped cars could not unlap themselves, but then gave the call for the five cars between Hamilton and Verstappen on track to do so on the penultimate lap, leaving the title fighters 1-2 on-track.

In a radio message that was not broadcast on the world feed, Hamilton said on the final lap: "This has been manipulated, man." Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff told Masi over the radio

that it was "not right".

Shortly after the race, Mercedes filed two protests with the FIA over the race result, leading to hearings on Sunday night at the circuit.

Mercedes' first protest claimed that Verstappen had overtaken Hamilton behind the safety car before the last-lap restart, but this was quickly thrown out by the stewards, who said the correct order was in place by the safety car line.

The bigger case surrounded Article 48.12 of the sporting regulations, which states that "any cars that have been lapped by the leader will be required to pass the cars on the lead lap and the safety car", and "once the last lapped car has passed the leader the safety car will return to the pits at the end of the following lap".

Only five of the eight lapped cars were allowed to unlap themselves and, had the safety car returned to the pits at the end of the following lap, there would have been just one corner of green-flag running from the safety car line to the chequered flag. Mercedes claimed that Hamilton would have won the race, and requested that the results be adjusted to the

end of the penultimate lap.

While the stewards said this regulation had not been applied "fully", they claimed that other regulations overruled it. This included Article 15.3, which states that the race director shall have "overriding authority" for the safety car, and Article 48.13, which claims that once the "safety car in this lap" message has been displayed, it must come in. This resulted in the protest being dismissed, and the results being made final with Verstappen as the winner.

Mercedes notified the FIA of its intention to challenge the decision, giving it 96 hours from Sunday night to formally go ahead with proceedings with the International Court of Appeal. The team was yet to offer any further update as Autosport went to print.

Red Bull F1 chief Christian Horner made clear that the team would fight the case in court if required, but called Mercedes' actions in Abu Dhabi "a little bit desperate". He also noted that Mercedes had brought a QC to the race and had him in the hearing.

"We never wanted to end up in front of the stewards," said Horner.

BRAWN AND SYMONDS TO LEAVE ROLES

FORMULA 1

Formula 1 managing director of motorsports Ross Brawn is set to step down at the end of next year, with chief technical officer Pat Symonds also planning to leave his role in the summer.

The news was contained in a document issued by F1 as an update on future developments within the organisation. It indicated that Brawn, who turned 67 last month, was “expected” to leave his role, and it is understood that the exact timing of his departure has not yet been finalised.

Following his departure from Mercedes at the end of 2013, Brawn enjoyed a period of relaxation away



Symonds (left) and Brawn go way back, here at Benetton in 1993

from the sport before taking his current job in January 2017, shortly after F1's takeover by Liberty Media. His task was essentially to oversee changes to the technical and sporting regulations, with the former coming into force next year, and novelties such as sprint races already introduced.

It is not yet clear whether

Brawn will retain an honorary or consultancy role with the F1 organisation, or who might replace him as managing director.

Symonds headed up F1's new technical department upon being hired in 2017, and played a key role in forming the regulations that come into force next year.

ADAM COOPER



Wolff's team took its own barrister to Yas Marina finale

“There was obviously a lot of debate before the race. As it turned out it was obviously very different after the race, but we don't go racing with barristers. It was a shame that ended up there but the stewards made the right call.”

A number of drivers expressed confusion over the restart procedure. Carlos Sainz Jr described it as “strange” and felt it nearly cost him a podium finish, while Lando Norris said it was “obviously made to be a fight”, adding: “It was for the TV of course, it was for the result. Whether or not it was fair is not up to me to decide.”

In the post-race press conference, Verstappen said Mercedes' protests “sum up the season a little bit”, but added on Monday that it had not spoiled his coronation as champion. “It is what it is, we were still happy and enjoying it,” he said. “We as a team didn't do anything wrong. We raced when there was a green light and green flag, so we went for it and we did it on track.”

LUKE SMITH



Team swaps begin at test

FORMULA 1

This week's Abu Dhabi Formula 1 test has allowed drivers to take to the track with their new teams in preparation for the 2022 season.

While Valtteri Bottas will not formally leave Mercedes until the end of the year, he was given permission to test for Alfa Romeo ahead of his switch and took to the Yas Marina track on Tuesday (above), the first day of the two-day test, clad in a plain white racesuit and Christmas-themed helmet.

Nine teams were due to complete two days of running with modified mule cars and the new-for-2022 18-inch Pirelli tyres. Teams could also complete one

day of young-driver testing with a 2021 car and the outgoing 13-inch rubber.

New F2 champion Oscar Piastri got his first taste of Alpine's 2021 car in the test, while Williams – which did not have a mule car – fielded Logan Sargeant on Tuesday for his F1 test debut.

Pato O'Ward was another notable attendee, testing for McLaren as a prize for scoring his first win for its IndyCar squad earlier this year.

George Russell was set to complete two days of running for Mercedes in its mule car, while Max Verstappen returned from his post-race celebrations to hit the track on Tuesday as an F1 world champion for the first time.

LUKE SMITH

Hyundai stars sad as Adamo stands down

WRC/WTCC

Hyundai's World Rally Championship drivers have paid tribute to boss Andrea Adamo following his shock departure as team principal.

The marque last week announced that the popular Italian has stepped down from his role after six years at the helm, citing personal reasons for his departure. Adamo enjoyed a successful tenure at Hyundai, leading it to back-to-back WRC manufacturers' titles in 2019 and 2020 on top of successes in the World Touring Car Cup with Gabriele Tarquini in 2018 and Norbert Michelisz in 2019.

Hyundai president Scott Noh has been installed as team principal on an interim basis while the German-based operation searches

for a successor to Adamo.

Hyundai star Thierry Neuville was particular saddened by Adamo's exit. "He was an important figure in the team," the Belgian told Autosport. "He was a person that as drivers we relied a lot on and we had 100% trust in, and that is something which is obviously very important as a driver's perspective."

"Obviously we were all surprised by the late call but honestly I 100% respect his decision for personal reasons. Anything personal goes ahead of anything business-related, and I give him all my support. We are disappointed but we are not stopping there."

Ott Tanak, who joined Hyundai last year after winning the 2019 WRC title with Toyota, posted an emotional tribute to his former boss on social media.



"Andrea is a man with a big heart," said Tanak. "He gave his everything for Hyundai Motorsport but also took care of us like his own children. He put together an amazing team and now it is our job to bring the trophy back next year! I am also grateful to

have such a great friend."

Hyundai has resumed its testing programme with the all-new i20 Rally1 to prepare for the WRC's introduction of hybrid regulations on January's Monte Carlo Rally season opener.

TOM HOWARD

Rossi tests Audi as taster for 2022 seat

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE

MotoGP legend Valentino Rossi could be heading towards a drive in the GT World Challenge Europe next season. The Italian tested for the WRT Audi team last week and is in negotiation to join its line-up in 2022.

The test followed the seven-time MotoGP champion's announcement that he intends to race full-time in cars now that he has brought the curtain down on his two-wheel career. Rossi completed a day in a WRT Audi R8 LMS Evo GT3 at Valencia last week and immediately received the plaudits of team boss Vincent Vosse.

"Valentino is a legendary rider, but he is also impressive as a driver," said Vosse. "His approach and his feedback mean I am sure he would be competitive. I don't see him being anything other than competitive."

That's why Vosse is looking to field the silver-rated driver in a car capable of going for overall victories in the



GTWCE: "He's a silver because he has only done four or five car races, but my goal is to put him in a Pro [class] car."

Vosse explained that the test last Thursday at the end of three days of running at the Spanish track by WRT was set up to "investigate if we want to work together in the future". That now appears to be the case, though the WRT boss stressed that "everything is open" for the moment. That includes whether Rossi would race in both the Endurance and Sprint segments

of the GTWCE or just one of them.

Vosse didn't rule out Rossi being part of WRT's LMP2 squad, but admitted that discussions are currently centred on the Belgian team's GT3 operation.

Rossi, 42, announced his plan to switch to cars last month. The next stage of his motorsport career will begin early in January with his third assault on the Gulf 12 Hours endurance in Abu Dhabi at the wheel of a Kessel Racing Ferrari 488 GT3 Evo.

GARY WATKINS

Peugeot gives Hypercar a run

WEC

Peugeot's new 9X8 Le Mans Hypercar is up and running. That much we know after the French manufacturer released a photograph last weekend of its 2022 World Endurance Championship contender being given its roll-out. What we don't know is whether or not the car has a rear wing.

The lone photo posted on Peugeot Sport's Twitter account on Saturday has been doctored to hide the rear of the car, though some kind of aerodynamic appendage can be seen on either side of the blanked-out area that carries the name of the team.

When asked whether these are part of a full-width rear wing, a Peugeot Sport spokeswoman replied: "Does it have a rear wing or not? Now you want to know the answer."

Peugeot made much of the absence of a conventional wing at the rear on release of the first images of the 9X8 in June. Olivier Janssonie, technical director of the WEC programme at Peugeot Sport, suggested the following month that there was only a "small possibility" that wholesale revisions to the radical aerodynamics would be required ahead of the race debut of the car.



Janssonie added that the in-house Peugeot Sport team was "100% confident" that the car would begin testing without it. That test programme has now started with the roll-out at an undisclosed proving ground and will quickly move to the race track proper, possibly before Christmas.

"We have a lot of tests planned, but we cannot say where or when – but development is starting now,"

said the spokeswoman. On the question of when it will begin, she didn't rule out the 9X8 making it out onto the test track this month. It may be significant that Peugeot hasn't stated when the shakedown took place.

Peugeot hasn't disclosed who was at the wheel, only that it was one of the seven drivers it has under contract for 2022.

GARY WATKINS



Old Verstappen team on F2 grid

FORMULA 2

As the fallout from the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix swirled, the team that gave Max Verstappen and his dad Jos their starts in car racing was confirmed on the FIA Formula 2 grid for 2022 in place of HWA Racelab.

Van Amersfoort Racing is adding F2 to its existing programmes in Formula Regional, Euroformula Open and German/Italian F4, as well as its new-for-2022 FIA F3 squad. Testing starts today (Thursday) at the Abu Dhabi post-season runout, with FIA F3 racer Amaury Cordeel in one of the cars for all three days, and HWA veteran Jake Hughes in the other for the first two, before EFO ace Cem Bolukbasi takes over.

"We will put our orange accent on the cars – orange is the new colour of racing!" joked team founder Frits van Amersfoort. He added that the team will work with a combination of HWA staff and VAR's own people: "HWA have some very good guys." Of Hughes (left), he said "we need an experienced guy" and that he is in the frame for a race seat for the 2022 campaign.

Before the test, leading team Virtuosi announced FIA F3 runner-up Jack Doohan and F2 regular Marino Sato as its line-up for next season. Carlin then confirmed a seat for Williams F1 protege Logan Sargeant, who rekindles a relationship with the team from British Formula 4 in 2017 and FIA F3 in 2019.

MARCUS SIMMONS

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MONTOKA TO RACE WITH SON AT SEBRING

IMSA

Ex-Formula 1 star and Indycar champion Juan Pablo Montoya will team up with son Sebastian at the Sebring 12 Hours in March at the wheel of a DragonSpeed LMP2 ORECA.

Montoya Sr is returning to the US entrant for a second season, with a full campaign on the P2 class of the IMSA SportsCar Championship together with team patron Henrik Hedman. His 16-year-old son will come into the DragonSpeed ORECA-Gibson 07 as the silver-rated driver for the opening P2 points-scoring round on 19 March ahead of the start of his single-seater season, which looks certain to be with Prema Powerteam in the Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine.

The sportscar debut for Montoya Jr follows a try-out with DragonSpeed at the World Endurance Championship rookie test in Bahrain last month. Team boss Elton Julian said that he “did such a good job that we had to get him in the car for a race”. He has spent two seasons in Italian Formula 4 with Prema, claiming fourth in the standings this year.

Hedman has decided to race in IMSA after winning the Pro-Am LMP2 class at the Le Mans 24 Hours this year. With a P2 victory at the Daytona 24 Hours in 2020, he has targeted completing the triple crown of endurance at Sebring. DragonSpeed will name its silver driver for the subsequent enduros at Watkins Glen and Road Atlanta at a later date.

GARY WATKINS



Cammish gets Ford for return

BTCC

Porsche Carrera Cup GB champion Dan Cammish is to return to the British Touring Car Championship in 2022 as one half of a two-car Ford Focus superteam at Motorbase Performance that will operate under the NAPA Racing banner.

Motorbase owner Pete Osborne has pulled in major backing from the UK division of automotive parts giant NAPA, which is famed for its NASCAR sponsorship. Cammish, who scored eight wins and twice finished third in the standings in a three-year stint with Honda squad Team Dynamics from 2018-20, is the first driver confirmed.

Cammish, who only lost his Dynamics drive for commercial reasons in the wake of Honda UK's withdrawal of support, told Autosport that his intention was to return to the BTCC. “While I was out of it I did look at other options and think, ‘What else is out there?’, and you suddenly realise there's not much,” said the 32-year-old. “I had sponsors based in the UK that didn't want to go abroad, and certainly if I went to Porsche Supercup they're two-thirds my age. Suddenly you're back in touring cars and that fits with where I am in life. It was

a no-brainer for me to come back.”

James Mundy, who led the design on the fourth-generation Focus ST that made its debut in 2020, will engineer Cammish: “He's had such an influence in this-shape car. We know each other from many years ago when he ran Jamun Racing in Formula Ford and I was competing against him. We've got a great relationship.”

“Motorbase seem a really great bunch of guys. I've had a few days there, and everybody seems motivated for a good season. It'll be a challenge with the new hybrid, but from what I've seen they're up for that.”

Jake Hill, who was fifth in the 2021 standings in the lead Motorbase-run car, is strongly tipped for a switch to another leading team in the BTCC, while two-time race winner Ollie Jackson and Osborne's son Sam are expected to stay on to race the two Focuses outside the NAPA stable.

Sources suggest that another established BTCC top-line driver is close to a deal to pilot the other NAPA entry, but Cammish remained coy. “I think my team-mate's going to be great, and as a pairing we'll be fantastic...” was all he would say on the subject.

MARCUS SIMMONS

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The call Masi should have made

The shambles that blighted the closing laps of the Abu Dhabi GP could have been avoided so easily – and it would have been fair to both championship contenders

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Let's get this clear immediately: Max Verstappen is a worthy and excellent 2021 Formula 1 world champion, and congratulations to him and his Red Bull team for the season they produced together. But the way in which the last laps of the Abu Dhabi finale played out was wrong in basically every sense. Not that this means that Verstappen or Red Bull deserve to lose the title or race win as a consequence – they did nothing wrong.

Taking the laps limit out of consideration, race director Michael Masi should have ordered all lapped cars to overtake the safety car, as is usually the case. There's ambiguity in the words "any cars" in Article 48.12 of F1's sporting rules concerning this practice but, by removing only the cars between Lewis Hamilton and Verstappen in the queue, that was uncomfortably against what has come before.

But it is the rest of Article 48.12 where there is much more of an issue, since it indicates that the race should have finished under the safety car. We now have to once again factor in the laps that were remaining, because the order for unlapped cars to come through was only issued on the penultimate lap. No wonder Hamilton said "this has been manipulated" while still in the cockpit.

But there was a way to have avoided this shambles, which has stained F1's reputation in the eyes of many: Masi simply could have red-flagged the race in the aftermath of Nicholas Latifi's crash.

This would have been fair to both parties, considering that

"Events suggest F1 has embraced the sacrifice of sporting integrity for the sake of entertainment"

Hamilton had the race won once it became clear that Verstappen's earlier fortune to pit under the virtual safety car wasn't paying off with his newer hard tyres, and Hamilton had already worked his way past the backmarkers. Furthermore, Red Bull had pushed him into a position where he couldn't pit and safely retain track position under the safety car.

With both Hamilton and Verstappen lining up for another standing start on the soft tyres – that rule looks ever more a part of F1's 'Netflix-effect' new soul – it would have removed the safety car rules farce and given both a fair crack at winning. And my money would have been on Verstappen.

The risk of a collision many had rightly feared pre-race would have been higher, since Verstappen was ahead on countback, and had the race's fastest lap point sealed during his pace after the VSC.

But it would have allowed Hamilton a better chance to defend with the same rubber, and he may well have been more aggressive in defence too. He couldn't have afforded not to be.

The 2021 season hasn't been a good year for the FIA in sporting terms. It has done brilliantly to get in another campaign, this time a full one, during the pandemic, but some calls have been utterly bizarre. There is a pervading sense that things have simply been made up as situations arise, and that F1's extensive sporting rulebook is now pretty pointless if one regulation can apparently supersede another and the race director can overrule regulations if he deems it necessary – these were the key justifications for Mercedes' second protest over the safety car debacle being thrown out. F1's rules don't seem equipped to cover what happened last Sunday, and that isn't a good thing.

Drivers are confused. So are fans, and that has contributed to the horrendous toxicity that has surrounded this amazing campaign. And it's pretty significant that even Red Bull thinks "the whole system needs to be rethought" for "consistency", according to its motorsport advisor Helmut Marko.

At the time of writing, Mercedes is still considering the merits of a full appeal over the decisions to dismiss its race protest. The next stage for this saga would be an FIA International Court of Appeal hearing, but it could yet go beyond that to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. That would be massive and problematic.

"The FIA, marking its own homework, perhaps unsurprisingly said that they stood by the decision of the race director," says Duncan Bagshaw, partner at the law firm Howard Kennedy and an international arbitration and litigation expert.

Masi can't call a late-race red flag now. Perhaps he'll never call another F1 race given that the current fiasco will be a key point to address for the soon-to-be-elected new FIA president. But if the saga continues and does go as far as CAS, it isn't a given that Mercedes' appeal would be unsuccessful. Verstappen doesn't deserve to lose the title in such circumstances, and Hamilton doesn't deserve to win in a manner unbecoming a racer.

It doesn't suit F1's traditional fair play racing philosophies either, although motorsport has a long history of legal spats. But it'll make a great episode of *Drive to Survive* and herein lies the real problem. The contentious events of Brazil and Abu Dhabi this year suggest that F1 has embraced the sacrifice of sporting integrity for the sake of an entertainment product that certainly sells. But sport, even when not providing the highest of thrills on occasion, is entertainment enough. It should be enhanced, not hurt, by being properly maintained and adjudicated for the clear understanding of all. ✎

 P14 ABU DHABI GP REPORT

Unser reunited with 1978 'Triple Crown'-winning Lola T500 at 2009 Goodwood Festival of Speed

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Al Unser 1939-2021

OBITUARY

Al Unser Jr once remarked, while revealing that he was as in awe of his father as were the rest of us: "Dad taught me everything I know... but he didn't teach me everything that *he* knows."

And now Al Unser, four-time Indy 500 winner, three-time Indycar champion, has left us at the age of 82, barely seven months after elder brother Bobby, and leaving a similar-sized hole in the ranks of US open-wheel legends. He never relished the spotlight like Bobby, and would never have dreamt of being as strident but, while Al made his opinions known *sotto voce*, they were no less fervent.

The Unser brothers' approach to racing was as disparate as their personalities outside the cockpit. Bobby was all about proving he was the best by running at the front as often as possible, and hoping the car would make it through in one piece. Al would look after the car, making sure it was healthy enough to fight for the win on the final lap.

"Al was never really big on qualifying," recalled Rick Mears, his team-mate at Penske from 1983 to 1987. "But that meant that if he did start up front, you had to

hang on come the race because he had the potential to head off into the distance. He reasoned that if he focused on race set-ups, he could work his way through – and he was absolutely right. Wherever he qualified, you had to keep your eye on Al because he'd be moving forward.

"If he was still running toward the end of a race, you better plan on having to deal with him because he and the car would still be strong and ready to fight. That was his whole MO – set up the car to be fast throughout a race, look after it until the last few stints, and then go for it. And it paid off – his finishing record, his top-five record, was the best. That's what wins championships – racing smart – and that's what Al always did."

If Al earned 'only' 27 pole positions to Bobby's 49, he also had a slightly better win tally (39-35), and earned one more title and one more Indy 500 triumph. And while he stuck rigidly to the policy of "the only lap you need to lead is the last one", ironically Al still holds the record for most laps led in the 500 – 644, to be precise.

He loved that stat, because Indianapolis Motor Speedway meant so much to him, perhaps because he felt the need to conquer the track where his eldest brother

Jerry had perished in 1959. In fact, Al was bewitched by the Speedway, gladly telling anyone that he'd have traded his three championships for one more Indy 500 victory, to be the only driver on five wins there. "In 1967, I was second behind Foyt," he recalled. "Yet the next day, someone asked me where I had finished. I was amazed! That taught me there's only one place to be at the 500, and that's number one."

There was no question who occupied that slot in 1970, Unser's second year at Vel's Parnelli Jones, working with legendary chief mechanic George Bignotti. Driving the Johnny Lightning Special Colt-Ford, Unser dominated Indy, leading 190 of the 200 laps. It would be one of 10 wins for the Unser/VPJ combo that year, leading to a dominant championship triumph for the Albuquerque, New Mexico native.

The competition caught and passed VPJ the following year, but at Indy Unser took one of his greatest wins by defeating Peter Revson in the vastly superior McLaren. Al would stay at VPJ until the end of 1977, and team co-owner Parnelli Jones – arguably the greatest Indycar driver in history – was a huge fan. "Al was smooth and controlled, a real thinker behind the wheel," he said. "He never talked a big

game; he let his driving do the talking. As an owner, I couldn't ask for a better driver — hands down, the best. He was always there at the end and usually up front. He was an all-around class act."

Unser would rack up a total of 24 victories at VPJ and form a bond with its rising young British engineer John Barnard. A switch to Jim Hall's Chaparral team for 1978 provided Unser with his third Indy 500 win, and that year he went on to become the only driver to earn the "triple 500 crown", with further triumphs at Pocono and Ontario Motor Speedway. Nonetheless, Unser wasn't terribly impressed with that Lola, but knew that Barnard was working on something very special for the team — the ground-effect Chaparral 2K. He would dominate the first half of the 1979 Indy 500, but there, like almost everywhere else, the car's potential was limited by its inability to get to the finish without niggling problems.

At the season finale in Phoenix, however, the stars aligned and Unser won... yet by then he had decided to follow Barnard out the door, believing that the rising star designer wasn't being

"At the age of 47, he became only the second driver to win four Indy 500s"

given enough credit by the team for the stunning 'Yellow Submarine'. Unser thus handed the keys of this remarkable car to Johnny Rutherford, just as Chaparral smoothed out its wrinkles. 'Lone Star JR' went on to dominate the 1980 championship — and win the 500 — while Unser would spend three frustrating years at the start-up Longhorn team.

Then came the second wind of his career, which led to two championships in three years with Team Penske, but it was Unser's final Indy 500 triumph, in 1987, that cemented his legend. As a late substitute for the injured Danny Ongais, and driving a year-old March that had been rescued from a display in a hotel lobby, Unser was in the right place at the right time when Mario Andretti's car wilted in the closing stages and, at the age of 47, he became only the second driver in history to win four Indy 500s.

Unser once remarked: "I wasn't paid to sell myself. I was paid to perform", and that's exactly what he did. He may have been reluctant to acknowledge it, but he was a true superstar of the sport.

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

First of four Indy 500 wins came in dominant performance in 1970



With son Al Jr in 1980. Five years later he would beat him to the CART Indycar crown by one point...



...at the wheel of Penske March-Cosworth, here seen at the Pocono 500



*Whatever the eventual outcome in this instance, Formula 1 needs a reset.
We need consistent decision-making, governed by the rules of the sport*

TRISTAN WOOD

Formula 1 is a sport, not a show

What a shame a classic Formula 1 season with great duelling between two top drivers ended the way it did, thanks to arbitrary decision-making by the FIA race director. The rules of any sport are there to be followed, and it was reasonable for Mercedes-Benz to base their decision-making on precedent — that it was highly unlikely there'd be sufficient laps for safety car procedures to be properly followed and still leave time for a racing lap at the end.

The stewards' decision that showing that the safety car will come in at the end of a lap takes priority over allowing all lapped cars to pass the safety car doesn't explain why five cars were allowed to pass and the others not, nor the conflicting messages prior to that as to whether any cars would be permitted to unlap themselves. And the view that setting the results from the previous lap would have meant "shortening the race retrospectively, and hence not appropriate" is laughable given the precedents for doing precisely that when bad weather or a serious accident has curtailed a grand prix.

Whatever the eventual outcome in this instance, F1 needs a reset. We need consistent decision-making, governed by the rules of the sport and taken during the event by the stewards — not the race director. Communication from teams to the race director or stewards during an event attempting to influence decisions should be banned. F1 needs to remember it's a sport, not a 'show'.

Tristan Wood
London SW19

Here's what to do with the rulebook

The FIA or Liberty Media or whoever actually now runs F1 should take a paper copy of the latest version of the rules, set fire to it and place the remains in a small dustbin-shaped container. This could then be awarded each year as the Michael Masi trophy. If Saudi Arabia was the race of disgrace, what on earth was Sunday?

Barry Johnson
By email

A championship is decided over a season

The FIA dropped a clanger on Sunday. We all wanted a race to the chequered flag, but given the short number of laps left surely the best option would have been to red-flag and restart the race? But what has annoyed me more than the FIA's bizarre handling of the restart procedure is the plethora of comments online that "Lewis was robbed" and Max is an "undeserving champion".

Let's just be clear, the champion is decided over 22 races, not one race. Both Max Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton have put together superb championship challenges this year; both drivers have been brilliant at times; both drivers have made

big errors at times; both drivers have experienced good and bad luck over the course of the season.

It is not Max's fault how those final few laps panned out; he just played the card he was dealt. To me, it would be equally unfair to retrospectively disregard the last lap of Sunday's race and give the title 'back' to Lewis. So well done Max. And commiserations to Lewis.

Stuart Coulter
Co Down

This is what we learned on Sunday

What did we learn from Sunday's race? Nicholas Latifi will not be on Lewis Hamilton's Christmas card list...

The sport's officials can't be open to the shouts of anyone that feels like taking a swipe; rules and regulations are hard and fast — just apply them and stick to a decision.

Hamilton is a class act. He had every right to feel desperately aggrieved and angry, but he was magnanimous in defeat and showed admirable humility. It would be nice if others displayed such balance and equanimity.

Congratulations to Max, heartfelt commiserations to Lewis. I look forward to next year — but only if some sense of sanity, respect and fairness spreads across the sport.

Alan Neale
By email

Another race-direction farce

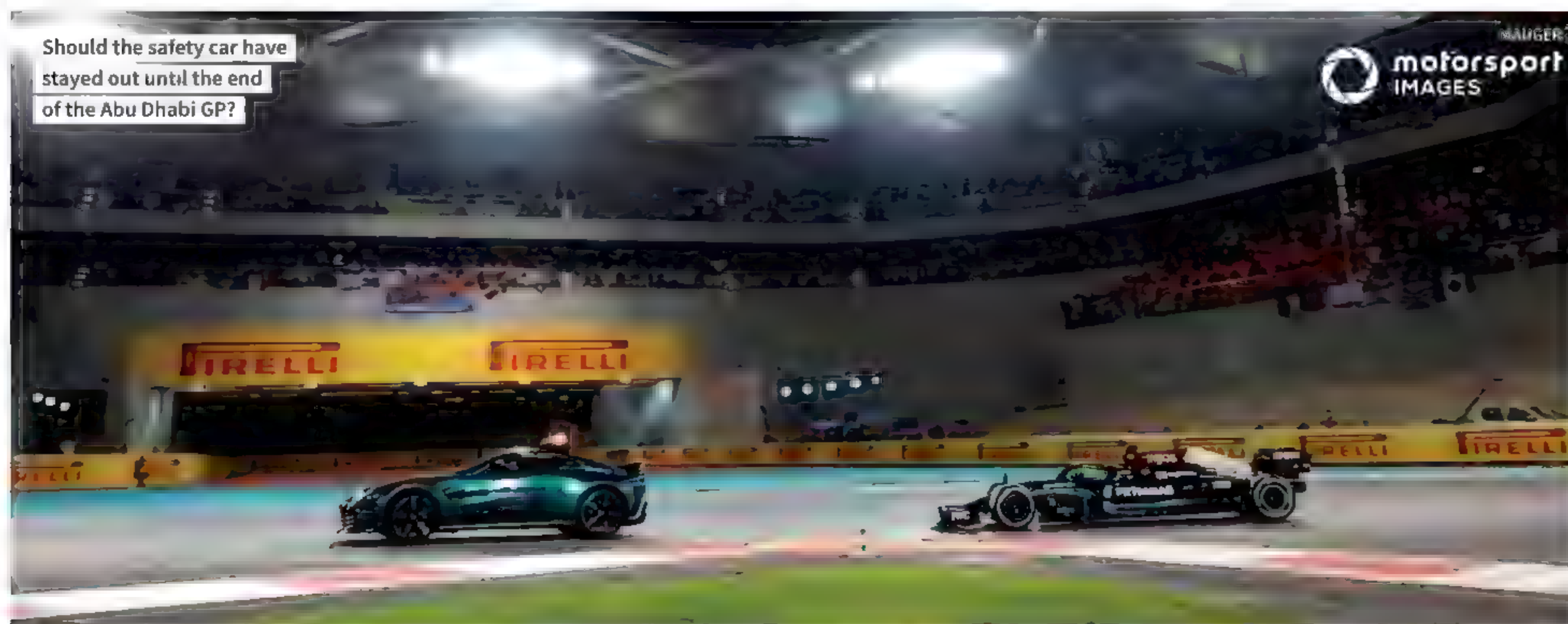
On an afternoon when we should have been celebrating either an eight-time or a first-time champion, we were served up another race-direction farce, in front of the largest TV audience F1 has enjoyed for some time.

As I understand it, there were two options: finish the race under the safety car, or restart without allowing cars to unlap themselves. The decision taken almost guaranteed a Verstappen victory, when the second option would have delivered an epic final lap and would have been much fairer.

We should not forget, though, that Hamilton benefited from good fortune earlier in the season — albeit with a correct application of the rules — when the red flag at Imola after the Russell-Bottas crash allowed him to unlap himself after his trip to the barriers and climb back from ninth to second place.

The rules on unlapping while the race is neutralised ought to be re-examined, and in my view the order of the cars on track should not be reshuffled at all. The FIA also needs to take a long hard look at the role of the race director, and their interaction with the teams.

Verstappen is a worthy champion, but his win will



unfortunately be forever tainted by the way it occurred — as will Hamilton's eighth if Mercedes successfully appeals.

Paul Cole

Orsett, Essex

The last lap was not a 'race'

Michael Masi should resign. If they didn't want the race to end under the safety car, they should have red-flagged the race and restarted with three laps to go. The organisers cannot make up the rules as they go, and what they did was blatantly unfair.

Whoever was in front could not stop for a tyre change without losing track position and by allowing the second-place car to change tyres and then be immediately behind the leader guaranteed the result — the last lap was not 'a race'.

Given the restrictions on the number of tyres that can be used, the rules should stipulate that all tyre changes can only take place during live racing conditions — if a tyre change is necessary for safety reasons during a red flag or safety car period then that car should have to do a drivethrough once racing resumes.

Maurice Westlake

By email

A championship decider to remember

Congratulations to Max Verstappen, Red Bull and not least to the foresight and quick thinking from Michael Masi, in difficult circumstances, in giving us a championship decider to remember for years to come.

Too many seasons have passed with titles decided well in advance of the final race, preceded by processions and predictable results. If Formula 1 wishes to capture worldwide attention, then it has achieved this comprehensively during 2021, primarily by letting two equally paced teams and their lead drivers 'race' one another right down to the wire. I would argue that this approach has achieved more in 12 months than over the past decade or so, which has seen only wrangling and argument prevail in how to move the sport forward.

Hugh Wroth

Marlborough, Wiltshire

Well, it is panto season

What should have been one of the greatest days in the history of Formula 1, the finale to one of its greatest seasons, after a colossal fight between two titans of the sport, was at the very last moment reduced to an absolutely shameful farce.

Graeme Innes-Johnstone

Elland

Caring for Sir Frank a privilege and inspiration

In his tribute (2 December), Karun Chandhok states that after Sir Frank Williams' life-altering injuries "the doctors often gave up in 1986". This could not be further from the truth. At the time, I was Prof Sid Watkins' senior registrar (essentially his second in command) in neurosurgery at The London Hospital and can state categorically that the team never gave up during the three months Frank was under our care. In fact several people happily went the extra mile for this extraordinary man. If we had given up he would probably not have survived for 36 hours, never mind nearly 36 years.

Three days after the accident Frank was transferred urgently to London from a hospital in Marseilles. This was because it was felt that, despite an emergency operation on his broken neck, the doctors there were too pessimistic and were not giving Frank the best chance. With such a catastrophic injury, causing quadriplegia, opinions can vary — among the doctors, nurses, patient and family — as to how hard to strive, in a particular case at a particular time, to keep the patient alive. Good communication, and confidence in the team, are essential. In the early weeks the patient's condition can be very unstable; Frank came close to death on several occasions. There may be considerable pain. The treatment is complex, intensive, prolonged and often unpleasant, and there is no cure. However, in this case the brief was always crystal clear.

Looking after Frank was a privilege and an inspiration. Frank's wife, Ginny, provided massive support for him. In her book *A Different Kind of Life* she gave a full and, at times, harrowing account; nowhere did she say that we often gave up. Erroneous comments can create a misleading and unfair narrative.

Brian Simpson

By email

HAVE YOUR SAY, GET IN TOUCH

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RACE CENTRE

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Max Verstappen
streaks across the line
in disbelief, to win the
race and his first F1
world title



ETIHAD ETIHAD

2021 SEASON SHOWDOWN

MAX CROWNED AFTER ROLLERCOASTER FINALE

On a tense night in Abu Dhabi, Lewis Hamilton had an eighth world title within his grasp. Then Nicholas Latifi crashed and everything changed...

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport
IMAGES

M

ax Verstappen laconically reflected on Mercedes' decision to protest – on two separate grounds – his victory in the 2021 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, which handed him world title glory over Lewis Hamilton on the road: "It sums up the season a little bit." But considering all that the race contained, the 90 minutes of action around the Yas Marina track were really the entire season in microcosm.

There was a passing controversy involving the title contenders, Red Bull and Mercedes furious with the FIA at separate points, amazing racing between Hamilton and Sergio Perez, tyre tactics and silly crashes. It really had all we'd seen before, plus new episodes that will live forever in F1's memory and will be hotly debated in person, on the toxic wastelands of social media and, surely, in the courtroom.

It was a race of nine chapters, with one in particular proving pivotal in how the race – and championship – ultimately turned out.

CHAPTER 1 – THE START

By qualifying on pole thanks to a brilliant Q3 performance, but having to start on the soft tyres due to a seemingly needless Q2 lock-up, Verstappen's pre-race circumstances actually had him at an advantage for the start with the grippier Pirellis. But he not only reacted slower to the lights than Hamilton, but he immediately entered a wheelspin phase as he accelerated through his lowest two gears. That meant Hamilton was able to quickly pull alongside the Red Bull from second, and easily sealed the lead at the left-hand first corner.

Verstappen's soft rubber was, however, still a crucial factor, since he was able to feel the "benefit of that tyre", said Red Bull team boss Christian Horner, out of the new downhill Turn 5 left-hand hairpin at the start of the track's second sector. Verstappen indeed rapidly closed on Hamilton as they raced down the track's back straight, then sent a late lunge to the inside of the first part of the following Turns 6/7 chicane.

Hamilton had left a big gap for Verstappen to aim for. The Mercedes did hesitantly swing left when Verstappen approached, but it was too late – the Dutchman got his front wheels ahead at the apex and then ran completely to the edge of the track. But unlike in Brazil and Saudi Arabia, he critically kept two wheels within the white lines, while Hamilton, having turned out of contact yet again, cut Turn 7 and retained the lead. Red Bull and Verstappen were incensed, with race director Michael Masi satisfied that, by slowing down once he'd cleared Turn 7 to hold only a 1.1s lead at the end of lap one of 58, Hamilton had given back any lasting advantage he'd gained.

It was an ultra-fine-margin call, where both sides could claim to be correct, the situation another example of F1's runoff areas creating uncertainty in racing rules that are already far from clear. Not that it would matter given the drama to come but, as Hamilton shot to a 3.4s lead by the end of lap 10, there was a sense that Verstappen might die by the sword, having lived by it all year in such wheel-to-wheel battles.



CHAPTER 2 – RED BULL'S STUCK STRATEGY

By lap 10, Verstappen had been telling Red Bull he was beginning to "struggle a bit" with his rear tyres, and then indicated things had got worse three tours later. And so, with Hamilton now 5.1s in front, Red Bull called Verstappen in to switch to the hards at the end of lap 13 – a move thought to be only fractionally slower than the medium-hard strategy Mercedes would employ, but one that prevented any strategic flexibility even before Verstappen had lost track position on lap one.

Mercedes was therefore able to pit Hamilton and cover Verstappen's stop immediately with his own service for hards, the early leader almost exactly maintaining the gap to his rival, who was at this stage struggling to follow Ferrari's Carlos Sainz Jr. The Spaniard was running fourth in the opening stint, after blasting past former team-mate Lando Norris in Turn 6 on lap one – the McLaren driver had gone off by himself at Turn 1 and dropped behind Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull. Verstappen was pushing on, at one stage running wide at the penultimate corner in his four-and-a-bit-lap pursuit of Sainz before he got ahead at Turn 6.

Here, Red Bull had no strategy options for its contender; it could only somehow deploy Perez. And, a day after its qualifying tow tactics had played out very nicely, it did so very effectively.

CHAPTER 3 – PEREZ'S DEFIANCE

After being cryptically told by engineer Hugh Bird that he was switching to "Plan B", Perez allowed Hamilton to rapidly close a 10.6s gap from the end of the Mercedes driver's out-lap to nothing over the following five.

Bird then informed his charge that "we'll be looking to hold up Lewis", and on lap 20 Hamilton arrived. He used DRS to swoop ahead of the Mexican on the run to Turn 6, but Perez roared back to the inside to retake the lead. Hamilton powered past on the exit of Turn 7, but again Perez persisted and forced his way through a narrow gap near the barrier on the curved blast to the new, long left-hairpin Turn 9.

"Back him up," came the call from Bird, and the pair ended this lap in the 1m34s and 1m33s respectively (Hamilton had done a 1m28.232s on the previous lap). Hamilton attacked again at the outside of Turn 1, after describing Perez's actions as "some dangerous driving", but was rebuffed, before he used DRS again to get ahead towards Turn 6.

But this time he went around and all the way to the inside to ensure that Perez finally had no fightback option, and Perez indeed allowed Verstappen ahead towards Turn 9 on the next 'straight'.



“GETTING HIM BACK OUT OF TURN 6 WAS KEY. I’M JUST HAPPY THAT IT WORKED OUT. IT WORKED WELL”

The gap between the title rivals was down to 1.7s, having reached 8.7s the lap before Perez’s stout, thrilling and utterly fair defence began.

“I think getting him back out of Turn 6 was the key to it,” Perez later reflected. “[I’m] just happy that it worked out because I could have cost him half a second at the time, but I’m just happy that I cost him a bit longer. It was a gamble. But it worked well.”

How well would be critical later on.

CHAPTER 4 – THE VSC SWING

In the next phase of the race, it didn’t seem as if Perez’s intervention would knock Hamilton off his world champion perch, since he quickly reasserted his advantage over Verstappen. In the 14 tours that followed him taking back the lead, Hamilton drew away again to a gap of 5.7s.

Then fate intervened. On lap 35, Antonio Giovinazzi capped a miserable double send-off at Alfa Romeo when he stopped with a sudden gearbox problem nine laps after Kimi Raikkonen had been forced out by a wheelnut issue apparently causing severe car instability (that explains the Turn 6 off he initially thought was caused by a brake problem).

Giovinazzi halted a fair way past the marshals’ post at the exit of Turn 9, triggering the virtual safety car as the Alfa was recovered.

Red Bull acted. It pulled Verstappen in at the end of lap 36 to take a cheap pitstop with the race neutralised and gain a tyre-life-offset advantage over Hamilton, who Mercedes could not pit given the risk of sacrificing track position at a circuit that remains a big overtaking challenge, despite all its changes ahead of this event.

When the VSC ended as Hamilton headed uphill towards the rapid Turn 2 left on lap 38, he had a 16.4s advantage over Verstappen. But he had tyres that were over 24 laps older, and with a gaggle of squabbling backmarkers to lap.

CHAPTER 5 – VERSTAPPEN’S CHARGE STALLS

Mercedes told Hamilton that Verstappen would have to gain by an average of 0.8s per lap if he was to have any hope of getting back to >>

QUALIFYING



It all overshadowed Yuki Tsunoda’s fabulous effort to get through Q2 on the medium tyres, the AlphaTauri eventually qualifying eighth after losing a time that would have put it sixth for going too wide at the final corner on its penultimate run. It definitely eclipsed the traffic chaos of Q1 and Q2, where Esteban Ocon – ninth in Q3 – was reprimanded for impeding Sebastian Vettel (15th). The final qualifying showdown between the 2021 title contenders was worthy of the finale.

Max Verstappen stunned Mercedes, which had led the way on single-lap pace in FP2. He rocketed to a 10th (official) pole of 2021 with a 1m22.109s, which came on his first Q3 run. There, Red Bull played a blinder.

The team, which has at times this year overcomplicated its qualifying plans, got Sergio Perez to run in front of Verstappen on his opening Q3 flier. He stayed just over five seconds in front to avoid his team-mate being disturbed by dirty air in the opening corners, then slowed on the track’s second straight before hitting the gas again, with Verstappen towed along at a 2s interval, prior to pulling over before the new Turn 9 hairpin. Verstappen reckoned it was only worth “a tenth”, with the rest down to his car feeling better as qualifying progressed. The move to Red Bull’s low-downforce package with its skinnier rear wing “felt nice”, said Verstappen in FP3, then the added set-up tweaks made for qualifying “were clearly working well”.

Lewis Hamilton, who had topped Q1, trailed his rival by 0.551s at this stage, the Mercedes locking up at the Turn 5 hairpin. Although Hamilton improved on his second run, he still shipped time to Verstappen’s initial effort all through his lap to wind up 0.371s adrift. Team boss Toto Wolff was pleased that his drivers had progressed through Q2 on the medium tyres, while Verstappen didn’t after he flatspotted his set with a Turn 1 lock-up, having set a time good enough to get through on that compound. But Wolff suspected the ambient temperature drop from 25°C to 24°C through qualifying meant Mercedes was “on the colder side of our tyre temperatures”, and that this boosted Red Bull.

Verstappen, who had returned the tow favour to Perez on the in-lap after his first run, was level-pegging with his first effort on his second Q3 attempt until he slipped wide at the Turn 13 left under the W Hotel, and was ordered to back off in any case since his pole was secure.

Lando Norris edged Perez for third, the McLaren driver having been enraged by coming across the Red Bull at Turn 13 on the lap when the Mexican towed Verstappen.

“PEREZ SLOWED BEFORE HITTING THE GAS AGAIN, WITH VERSTAPPEN TOWED ALONG AT A 2s INTERVAL”



the front by the finish. The leader had already expressed his concern about the hards lasting to the end, even before Giovinazzi's retirement shook things up, but he was left with little choice but to raise his pace.

Hamilton, who had been running in the 1m27s before the VSC, now reached the 1m26s bracket. Over the next 13 laps, Verstappen did eat into his lead, but only at 0.3s every tour to reach 11.9s behind at the end of lap 52. This phase included Verstappen setting the fastest lap at 1m26.103s on lap 39, and the pair lapping the two Alpines, Daniel Ricciardo and Charles Leclerc, who had slid off while wildly "surprised" by Verstappen when the Red Bull rejoined at the fast Turn 3 right after its first stop.

"I wouldn't have caught him," Verstappen later explained. "They just had too much pace in the car, even for me with fresher tyres. It just didn't look like it was going to happen."

But fate intervened again. This time decisively.

CHAPTER 6 – LATIFI'S CRASH

On lap 53, Nicholas Latifi crashed hard at Turn 14, reprofiled for 2021 as part of the Yas Marina overhaul and now much faster than before – but still tricky, as Raikkonen had found to his cost in FP2.

Latifi was undone by the turbulent air from Mick Schumacher's Haas, which had run him off track in defence as they raced through Turn 9, meaning the Williams also had less grip on dirty rubber. "It was never my intention and I can only apologise for influencing and creating an opportunity," Latifi later said. "But I made a mistake."

The influence he'd created was that, with such a mess on the track, Masi had to deploy the safety car. This gave Red Bull the chance to pit Verstappen for a third time, with Mercedes still stuck and unable to





“WITHOUT ‘CHECO’ I WOULDN’T BE SITTING HERE BECAUSE THEN THEY WOULD HAVE HAD A PIT GAP”

bring Hamilton in for fear of giving up the lead. And it was all because of Perez’s earlier defence. “Without ‘Checo’ I wouldn’t be sitting here,” Verstappen said in his champion’s press conference. “Because then they would have had a pit gap with the safety car.”

That is debatable. Taking Verstappen’s deficit on the lap before he pitted to take softs and adding that to the 7s he gained with Perez’s defence makes 18.9s. The fastest pitlane time of the day was Verstappen’s 21.152s at his first stop, which would cost a few seconds less than that on track under safety car conditions. With the risk of a high-pressured stop going wrong, as has happened at Mercedes already this year, it simply could not take the risk with a world title on the line.

CHAPTER 7 – THE SAFETY CAR ARGUMENTS

Initially, it looked doubtful that the race would get going again, but by lap 55, when Latifi’s wreckage was craned away, it was obvious that the track would be cleared in time. Hamilton was at risk from Verstappen on his new tyres, but there were still the lapped Norris, Fernando Alonso, Esteban Ocon, Leclerc and Sebastian Vettel between them (they hadn’t pitted under the safety car, as six others did). Perez then retired to the pits because, he said, his “engine was on the limit and the last thing we wanted to have is a failure and then not have the opportunity for Max to have that lap” by an extension of the safety car period.

With two laps left, Masi decreed via a message on the FIA’s timing system that the lapped cars would not be allowed to overtake, as typically happens ahead of a restart. Then, on the penultimate tour, following a lobbying call from Horner, Masi appeared to change his mind, saying “give me a second, my big one is to get this incident clear”. Suddenly Norris, the Alpines, Leclerc and Vettel were waved past Hamilton.

Mercedes was incensed, Toto Wolff calling Masi three times to no avail. This was the main thrust of its two post-race protests – that Article 48.12 of F1’s sporting rules states “any cars that have been lapped by the leader will be required to pass the cars on the lead lap and the safety car”; and “once the last lapped car has passed the leader the safety car will return to the pits at the end of the following lap”.

Therefore, Mercedes feels, the race should have finished under the safety car. But it didn’t, with Hamilton and Verstappen jockeying ahead of a final-lap blast to end this season of seasons. >>





TRACKSIDE VIEW

The changes to the Yas Marina track ahead of the 2021 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix are extensive enough for the FIA to declare it is “considered a new circuit”. And Autosport decides to spend FP1 walking down through the first sector to view the new Turn 5.

Before, the cars would end the first sector by shooting downhill from Turn 3, then enter a technical chicane before tackling a tight hairpin surrounded by a stadium section. That combination was one of the main reasons why the track produced such dull races, with the cars unable to follow closely. We won’t be seeing any of that in practice, but there’s plenty to discover at the new layout, which has the cars blasting down from Turn 3 and through the superfluous Turn 4 kink before entering a new, long, wide hairpin, which now has a much higher average speed.

The cars are braking so late – just before the 50-metre approach board – and not for long, as the drivers aim to carry momentum onto the critical long straight beyond. There are three distinct lines here, because the track is deceptively sloped down towards the apex, much more so than it appears on TV images: one is tighter to the inside, where the Red Bull drivers generally go – it doesn’t look fast, but Max Verstappen will top the session; the Mercedes



“THEY ARE BRAKING SO LATE – JUST BEFORE THE 50-METRE BOARD – AND NOT FOR LONG”

drivers are widest of all, apexing very late; the rest come through somewhere in the middle.

Lewis Hamilton can keep up his speed better here than team-mate Valtteri Bottas, who is having two bites at getting the front end turned in, with Verstappen trying this approach later on and also finding that he needs several steering inputs to make it through.

There are very few mistakes made for most of the session – although Williams reserve driver Jack Aitken, in for George Russell in FP1, is having a trickier time in the FW43B. On one occasion he brakes too late on the wider line and slides deep with a locked left-front tyre. But by the end of the session, when the teams have switched to running higher fuel loads to gather valuable data on tyre degradation – even in the sunny and unrepresentative opening one-hour session – the pack is finding it harder. Mick Schumacher spoils a set of medium tyres with a lock-up late on in his Haas, which is

mirrored by Bottas in the closing minutes of the session.

We note the crowd chatting away enthusiastically away behind our backs, with noticeably more orange-clad fans out to support Verstappen than those waving Union Flags in support of Hamilton. In FP3, where we walk in the opposite direction from the paddock to take in the new Turn 9, very long left-hand hairpin at the end of back straight – and which is a disappointing lack of a challenge for the drivers – his fans pack the stands opposite. The orange army on the merch.

ALEX KALINAUCKAS



New variety of lines and a faster approach now give Turn 5 a different character

Verstappen leads
as a stunning
realisation begins
to sink in



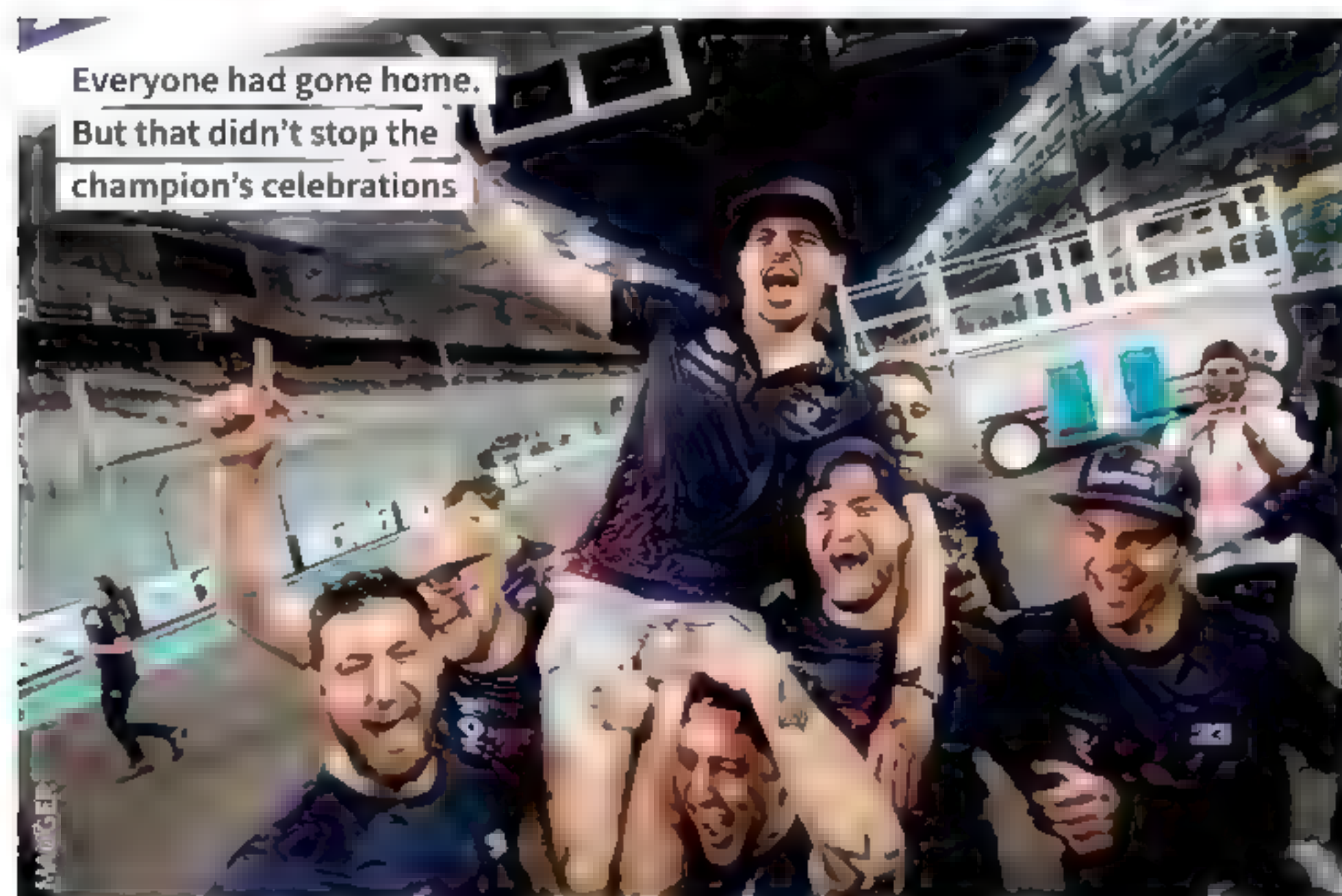
This was another bone of contention for Mercedes, which felt that Verstappen had overtaken Hamilton under safety-car conditions pre-restart by pushing his nose marginally in front at one stage. But the stewards later rejected this argument on the grounds that “both cars were ‘on and off the throttle’”, and that there were “a million precedents under safety car where cars had pulled alongside then moved back behind the car that was in front”, according to their decision document.

CHAPTER 8 – THE FINAL LAP

Hamilton led Verstappen back onto the pitstraight and entered the final lap of F1 2021 with a 0.5s advantage. But his 43-lap-old (and pre-race-scrubbed) hard tyres were never going to resist Verstappen’s new softs. At Turn 5, his first chance, Verstappen went for it. He shot to the inside and steamed ahead, Hamilton again perhaps leaving the door slightly ajar, although this is now a turn with a very late apex.

Verstappen then led his rival down to Turn 6 and the scene of their opening-lap clash – a minor controversy blip in comparison to the late-race hysterics. He weaved five times as he did so, perhaps fortunate to get away with such tactics. Then he stuck to the inside line on the curved run to Turn 9 and won the title on the road when Hamilton, with DRS not allowed immediately after a restart, had no way to get ahead.

Verstappen won by 2.3s, Hamilton claiming “this has been manipulated” before silently returning to the pits and sitting motionless in his Mercedes’ cockpit for two minutes, while Verstappen celebrated in front of the packed grandstands – with more Dutch occupants than British, it seemed – on the pitstraight.



Everyone had gone home.
But that didn't stop the
champion's celebrations

“It’s unbelievable,” Verstappen said there. “I mean, throughout the whole race I kept fighting and then of course that opportunity on the last lap, it’s incredible. It’s insane. These guys, my team, and Honda, they deserve it. I love them so much. I really enjoy working with them, already since 2016, but this year has been incredible.”

Verstappen later revealed that he had been in considerable pain during the final, thrilling lap: “[I had] a massive cramp in my leg in that whole last lap. I was behind Lewis going through Turns 2, 3 and I had a massive cramp. I was like full throttle but barely just having the force to push anymore. I was happy that there was Turn 5 so I could brake and relax for a few seconds, and then back on it for the two long straights which is very painful. But for that last lap, you just bite through it. Insane emotions afterwards.”

CHAPTER 9 – BEHIND THE SCENES OF CONTROVERSY

Hamilton was utterly dignified in defeat, saying “a big congratulations to Max and to his team” as a first gesture in parc ferme. But after the podium he returned to the Mercedes hospitality building, where he stayed until he departed the track nearly five hours later.

In the meantime, his squad and Red Bull visited the stewards three times – twice to argue the merits of Mercedes’ two protests, lodged between Verstappen speaking to TV crews after the podium and before he faced the written press over Zoom, and once to hear the verdicts. As barrister Paul Harris QC, famous for working with Premier League football clubs, argued on its behalf, Mercedes privately stated its case as the race’s moral victor to reporters in the paddock.

When the final decision came, at 2215 local time, Horner and co walked from the stewards’ office to Red Bull’s hospitality block, where cheers were erupting.

With the protests rejected – decisions Mercedes seems set to appeal at the time of writing – the assembled Red Bull squad streamed through its garage for a celebration photo. As they did, the music kicked into life from inside the pitbox. Queen’s *We Are the Champions*. What else? ✽

NEXT F1 REPORT

BAHRAIN GRAND PRIX 24 MARCH ISSUE

The big F1 reset begins as the 2022 season kicks off with new cars – and George Russell in a Mercedes. But will there be a new world order?

ALPHATAURI EFFORT CANNOT UNSEAT ALPINE

Max Verstappen wasn't the only driver to profit from a safety car pitstop in Abu Dhabi — AlphaTauri pair Yuki Tsunoda and Pierre Gasly both passed Valtteri Bottas to collect the team's biggest points tally of the season, but it wasn't enough to catch Alpine in the fight for fifth in the constructors' table.

Tsunoda overtook Bottas on the opening lap before being overcut by the Finn, who ran long after dropping back on the opening lap. Gasly was also given a long opening stint, as he chased Fernando Alonso from 12th on the grid — this pair started on the hard tyres and gained considerably when they made a pitstop under the virtual safety car.

AlphaTauri's race was then transformed under the safety car. While Sergio Perez retired with an apparent engine issue, Tsunoda and Gasly effectively had a free pitstop each, with the cars behind already lapped by leader Lewis Hamilton and therefore stuck in the queue. That meant they could switch to the soft tyres for the late sprint finish. Both drivers passed Bottas in dramatic style either side of the Turns 6/7 chicane, with Tsunoda sealing a career-best fourth place and Gasly fifth.

It represented AlphaTauri's best overall result of 2021 but didn't overhaul Alpine's total — Alonso grabbed eighth place, directly ahead of team-mate Ocon, and the French manufacturer sealed fifth position by 13 points.



Sainz pips Leclerc and Norris to 'best of the rest' fifth in points

Carlos Sainz Jr won the three-way scrap for fifth in the 2021 drivers' championship to end up as the best non-Red Bull or Mercedes racer ahead of McLaren driver Lando Norris and Ferrari team-mate Charles Leclerc.

Leclerc had led the scrap, which Sainz described as "more symbolic than anything", into the Abu Dhabi finale by four points over Norris, with Sainz another 4.5 points behind. But Leclerc's 10th-place finish, Norris's seventh place and Sainz's third position (following Sergio Perez's late retirement) tipped the balance completely.

Sainz had narrowly lost out to former team-mate Norris in qualifying. But the Briton, who started third, slipped off the road exiting Turn 1, Perez powered past him, and then Sainz demoted him to fifth with a run down the long straight to Turn 6. From there, Sainz ran well adrift of Perez — before and after his critical defence against Lewis Hamilton — but comfortably held Norris at bay in fourth.

On lap 48, Norris had to pit with a slow puncture, which McLaren team boss Andreas Seidl said was not a "structural

failure of the tyre due to the loads the car has seen with the kerbs", but "bad luck", possibly due to Norris hitting debris. He rejoined eighth, and was seventh by the finish thanks to Perez's DNF, Norris the highest-placed of the drivers allowed to unlap themselves under the late safety car.

Leclerc ran as the last of the trio in the opening stint after he put in a bold pass on Valtteri Bottas at Turn 3 on lap one. He slid wildly off the track at the same spot when Max Verstappen emerged from the pits, the Monegasque saying he "basically got surprised" in sudden turbulence and fell behind Yuki Tsunoda.

Leclerc then scrapped with Bottas after his service, but a second stop to go from the hard tyres to the mediums (he'd started on softs) under the VSC backfired when he got stuck behind Daniel Ricciardo to the end.

"A year that I'm quite proud of," Sainz said after claiming his fourth podium of 2021. "To finish it with a podium that probably no one will remember — I'll add it to the collection — because of whatever was happening in front [with the title contenders]."



"THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE"

George Russell left F1 observers in no doubt of how he felt about the Abu Dhabi race's ending, which deprived his soon-to-be team-mate Lewis Hamilton of an eighth world title. The Briton had retired on lap 26 when a visor tear-off that was stuck in his airbox caused his gearbox to overheat.





Mixed race for Alonso, Ocon

Alpine drivers Fernando Alonso and Esteban Ocon encountered contrasting fortunes at the mid-race virtual safety car that followed Antonio Giovinazzi's gearbox-problem-induced retirement.

Ocon, who had been running behind Valtteri Bottas in the opening stint, was an early stopper, exchanging his softs for used hard tyres on lap 15. He eventually ran behind Yuki Tsunoda and Charles Leclerc when most of the opening stops had taken place, but lost two places to Pierre Gasly and Alonso being able to take a cheap VSC stop when Giovinazzi retired on lap 36, although he gained a place as Leclerc pitted his Ferrari again.

Alonso got stuck into the AlphaTauris after his stop, but they soon raced clear, and the Alpine duo then had a late battle with Lando Norris as he recovered from his slow puncture. They unlapped themselves ahead of the last-lap shootout, where they could not gain ground.

Unfortunate farewells for Raikkonen and Giovinazzi

Kimi Raikkonen's Formula 1 career ended in a retirement apparently caused by a suspected wheelnut problem, while his Alfa Romeo team-mate Antonio Giovinazzi also failed to finish his last race for the team — and in F1 for now — due to a broken gearbox.

Raikkonen, the 2007 world champion, started his 349th and final grand prix with a ceremony put on by F1 on the grid before the 'We Race as One' moment, but his participation ended at half-distance when, three laps after his pitstop, a wheelnut problem apparently caused him to spin under braking at Turn 6 and clip the wall. While the Finn

was able to rejoin, he subsequently pitted and retired.

"It was a wheelnut issue, I guess the wheel wasn't on the proper way," said Raikkonen. "I'm happy to move on to a normal life — I am looking forward to it. I will miss a lot of the great people I met over the years. Twenty years have gone quickly. I made lots of memories — some good, some bad — and these are going to stay with me forever."

Giovinazzi's race ended after 33 laps with a sudden gearbox failure, his first retirement of the campaign. The Italian will now prepare for his maiden Formula E campaign with Dragon Penske, starting next month.



Q&A

VALTTERI BOTTAS MERCEDES DRIVER

What happened on the first lap when you dropped back?

I can't remember the first lap! I definitely think the cars with the soft [tyre] had the advantage, the same thing with the restart at the end. It made quite a big difference and honestly, I tried to play it safe because I knew the worst thing I could do is break my front wing on something.



I definitely tried to minimise risk and make sure that we at least got the constructors'. It felt like because I was a bit further back that it was up to Lewis to get the drivers', but he was unlucky with that.

Was your car quicker than the Red Bull here?

It's hard to say because Lewis and Max were on different tyres, and they also had tyre offset in the second stint. I think we had a

good car, a good race car. Probably quite similar.

How was your long-run strategy going pre-safety car?

It was crazy. I've had some time to follow what was happening in the front. And I really feel for Lewis — he had a great start here, had a great race, I feel like he was controlling it. But this is Formula 1, you never know what happens. And the safety car definitely went against us and against Lewis. So quite mixed emotions. I'm really proud that we got the constructors', but obviously the drivers'

championship is a big thing.

What information did you get behind the safety car about the lapped runners?

First information I got was that lapped cars may overtake, stop weaving so they can overtake. But the next message was they are not allowed to overtake, which was quite weird. And then I got the message, I think one or two laps after that, now they are allowed to overtake and then the safety car was going to be in, so they [Lance Stroll and Daniel Ricciardo] never got to overtake. It was a bit messy.

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DRAWING BOARD

GIORGIO PIOLA

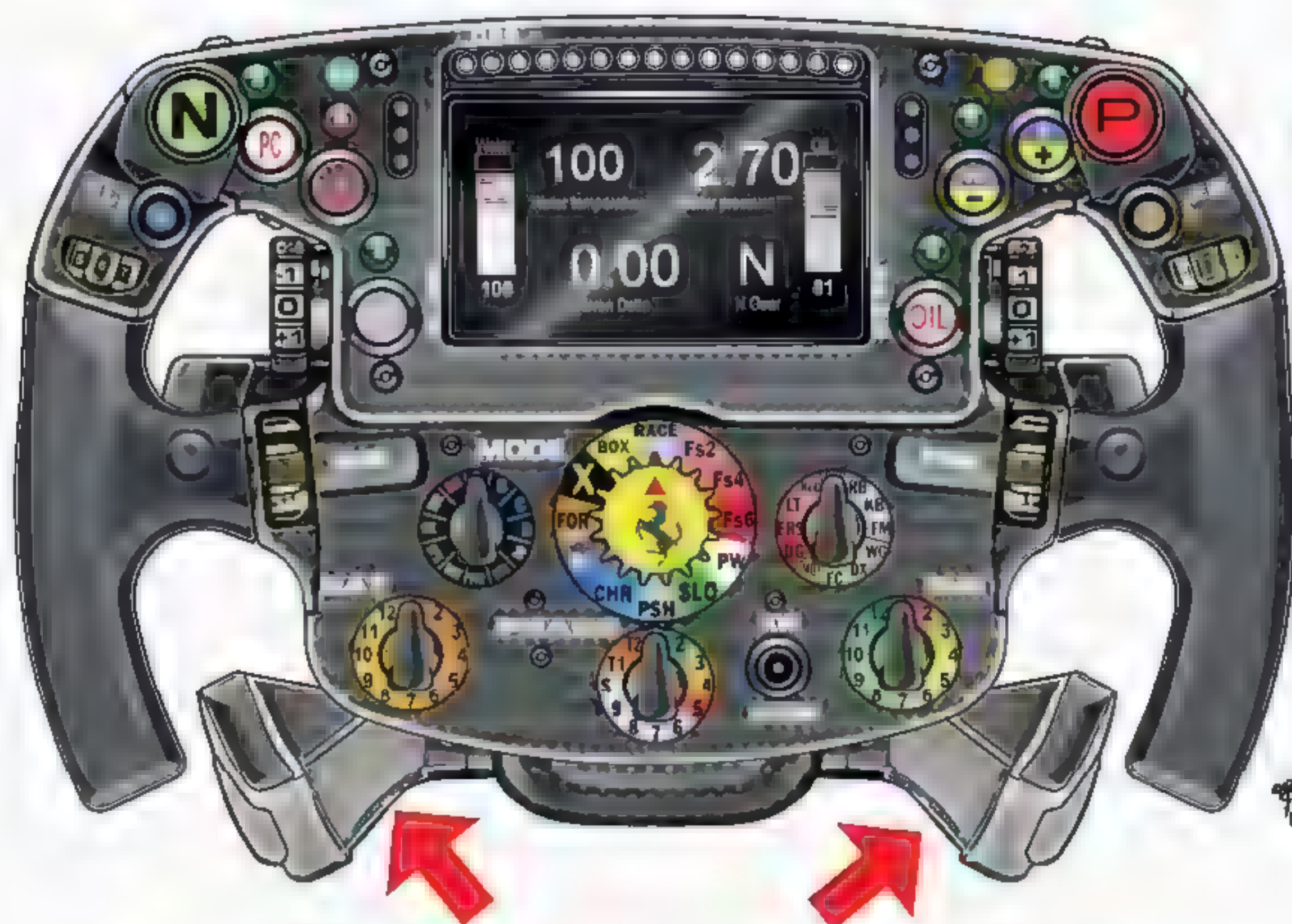
WHEEL TWEAK HELPS SAINZ AT FERRARI

After transferring from McLaren to Ferrari for 2021, Carlos Sainz Jr spent the first half of the year learning the ropes of the Ferrari SF21, meaning Charles Leclerc began the season as the de facto team leader. Sainz then built an impressive run of form from the mid-season Austrian double-header, putting together a 15-race streak of points finishes that included three third places. It carried the Spaniard above Leclerc and former McLaren team-mate Lando Norris in the standings, handing him fifth overall.

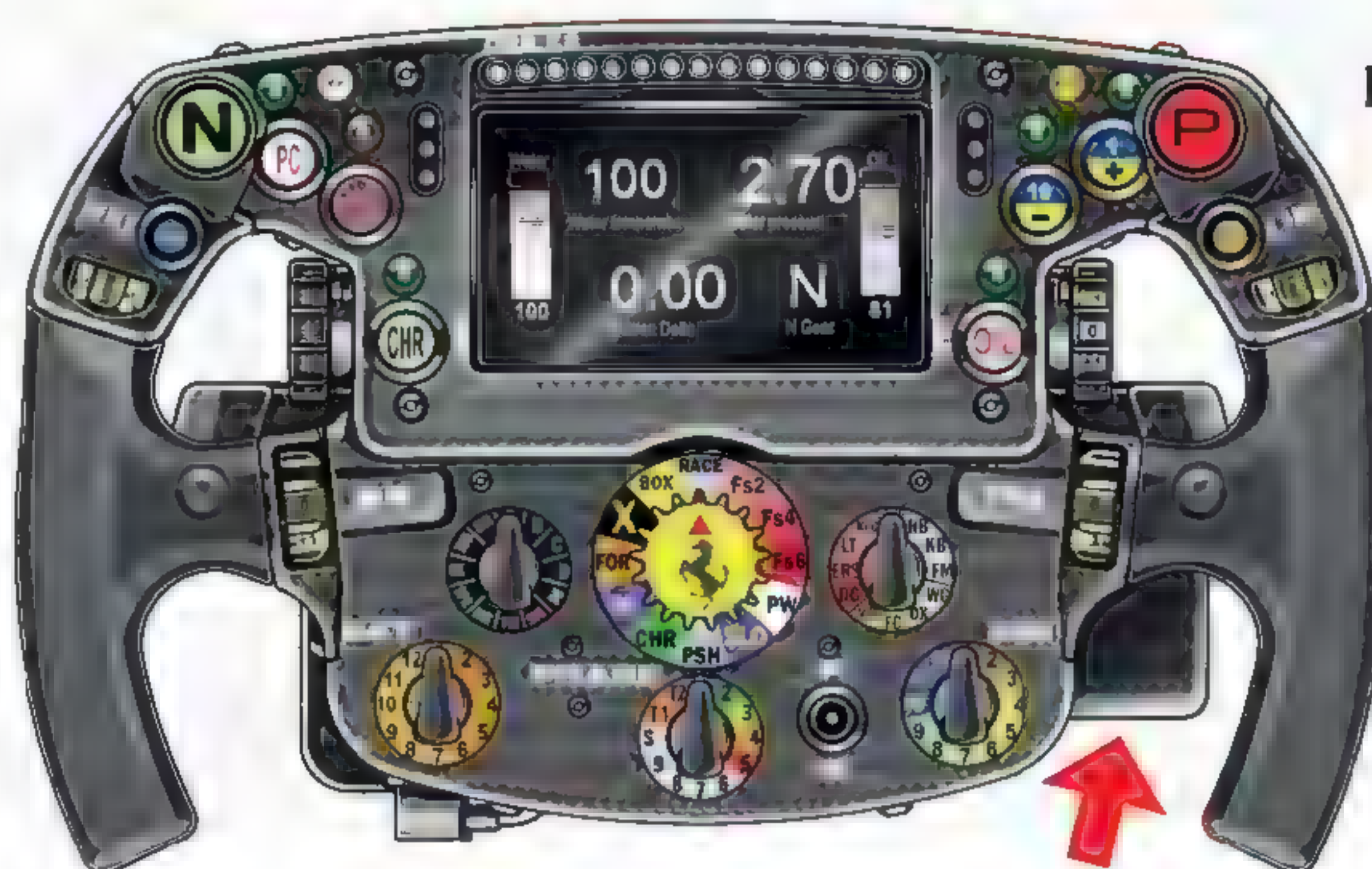
To settle in at Ferrari, Sainz partially modelled his steering wheel on the one he used at McLaren, albeit using all of the Ferrari mod cons. Both Ferrari drivers use pull-type clutch-control paddles at the bottom, part of an F1 regulation introduced last year to hand drivers more of the responsibility over clutch control at the start. But while Leclerc uses a single paddle, controlled by his right hand, Sainz has two paddles into which his fingers can fit to improve his control and feel while plotting his getaway off the grid.

Many drivers go further in adapting their steering wheel to a more familiar layout, but the rest of the buttons remain situated in the same places as they do for Leclerc, suggesting Ferrari wasn't totally willing to compromise.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



SAINZ



LECLERC

FERRARI'S SUPPLE SUSPENSION

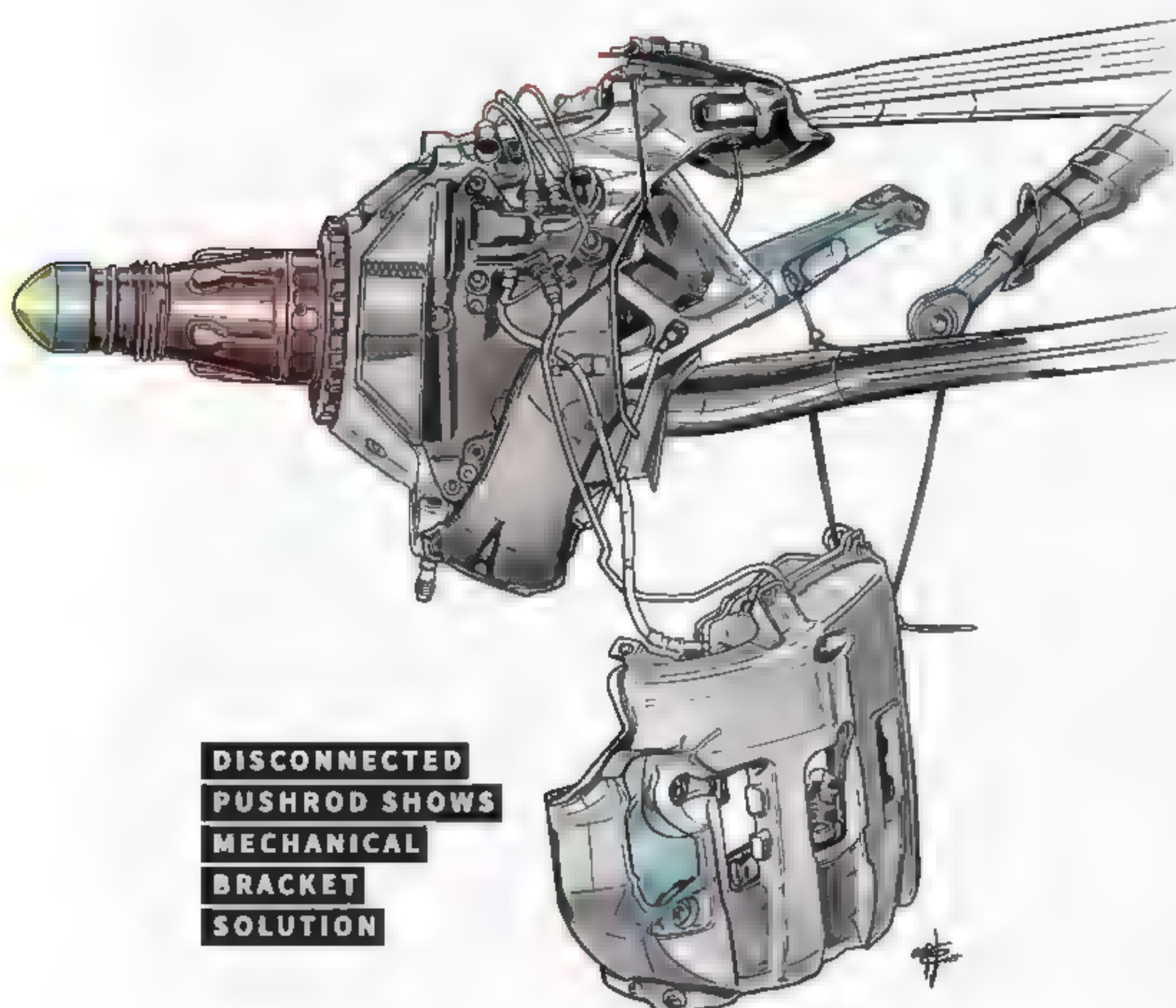
One of Ferrari's strengths over the past few seasons has been its cars' compliance over bumps and kerbs. In 2019, the SF90's biggest attribute was its straightline performance, but it was equally as impressive in Singapore, where the ease with which Sebastian Vettel and Charles Leclerc were able to ride the kerbs was quite extraordinary.

Ferrari has managed the same this season, ensuring that the drivers don't get unsettled by any kerbs or changes in track characteristics and thus don't have to lose time compensating with any corrections. Ferrari's front upright is, externally, conventional enough for a modern-day F1 car, featuring the extensions to carry the wishbone rod ends to benefit

the aero platform around the front end. In Giorgio Piola's image, the pushrod is disconnected from the upright bracket it attaches to, which protrudes out of the upright. This is something that most modern F1 cars feature, and is likely to be a mechanical solution to reducing the amount of front-end roll in the corners to provide a more stable aerodynamic platform.

That said, the real suspension toys are situated within the chassis bulkhead, including the torsion bars and inerts that can restrict any movement to continue that aero stability. But both of those tools will be removed for 2022, with coil-over-damper suspension now mandated by the rules.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



DISCONNECTED
PUSHROD SHOWS
MECHANICAL
BRACKET
SOLUTION



FREE PRACTICE 1

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Verstappen	1m25.009s
2	Bottas	1m25.205s
3	Hamilton	1m25.355s
4	Perez	1m25.363s
5	Tsunoda	1m25.378s
6	Alonso	1m25.625s
7	Gasly	1m25.822s
8	Leclerc	1m25.846s
9	Sainz	1m25.886s
10	Vettel	1m26.007s
11	Ocon	1m26.025s
12	Norris	1m26.123s
13	Raikkonen	1m26.189s
14	Giovinazzi	1m26.409s
15	Stroll	1m26.608s
16	Ricciardo	1m26.676s
17	Aitken	1m27.481s
18	Latifi	1m27.487s
19	Schumacher	1m27.698s
20	Mazepin	1m28.305s

WEATHER Sunny, air 27-28C track 38-40C

FREE PRACTICE 2

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Hamilton	1m23.691s
2	Ocon	1m24.034s
3	Bottas	1m24.083s
4	Verstappen	1m24.332s
5	Perez	1m24.400s
6	Alonso	1m24.495s
7	Tsunoda	1m24.532s
8	Leclerc	1m24.557s
9	Sainz	1m24.844s
10	Gasly	1m24.940s
11	Ricciardo	1m24.959s
12	Giovinazzi	1m25.108s
13	Norris	1m25.153s
14	Vettel	1m25.195s
15	Stroll	1m25.385s
16	Raikkonen	1m25.440s
17	Russell	1m25.549s
18	Latifi	1m25.687s
19	Schumacher	1m25.784s
20	Mazepin	1m26.336s

WEATHER Twilight, clear, air 24-25C track 28-30C

FREE PRACTICE 3

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Hamilton	1m23.274s
2	Verstappen	1m23.488s
3	Bottas	1m24.025s
4	Perez	1m24.047s
5	Norris	1m24.106s
6	Tsunoda	1m24.223s
7	Gasly	1m24.251s
8	Sainz	1m24.595s
9	Ricciardo	1m24.733s
10	Leclerc	1m24.758s
11	Stroll	1m24.821s
12	Ocon	1m24.834s
13	Raikkonen	1m25.037s
14	Giovinazzi	1m25.048s
15	Alonso	1m25.094s
16	Vettel	1m25.115s
17	Russell	1m25.220s
18	Latifi	1m25.322s
19	Schumacher	1m25.340s
20	Mazepin	1m26.332s

WEATHER Sunny, air 26C track 36-38C

SEASON STATS

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP	PTS	BEST FINISH	BEST QUAL
1 Verstappen	395.5	1	1
2 Hamilton	387.5	1	1
3 Bottas	226	1	1
4 Perez	190	1	2
5 Sainz	164.5	2	2
6 Norris	160	2	1
7 Leclerc	159	2	1
8 Ricciardo	115	1	4
9 Gasly	110	3	4
10 Alonso	81	3	5
11 Ocon	74	1	5
12 Vettel	43	2	5
13 Stroll	34	6	8
14 Tsunoda	32	4	7
15 Russell	16	2	2
16 Raikkonen	10	8	12
17 Latifi	7	7	12
18 Giovinazzi	3	9	7
19 Schumacher	0	12	14
20 Kubica	0	14	18
21 Mazepin	0	14	18

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 Mercedes	613.5
2 Red Bull	585.5
3 Ferrari	323.5
4 McLaren	275
5 Alpine	155
6 AlphaTauri	142
7 Aston Martin	77
8 Williams	23
9 Alfa Romeo	13
10 Haas	0

QUALIFYING BATTLE

Hamilton	16	5 Bottas
Perez	1	20 Verstappen
Ricciardo	6	15 Norris
Vettel	14	8 Stroll
Alonso	11	10 Ocon
Leclerc	13	8 Sainz
Gasly	20	1 Tsunoda
Raikkonen	7	13 Giovinazzi
Kubica	0	2 Giovinazzi
Mazepin	2	20 Schumacher
Latifi	2	19 Russell

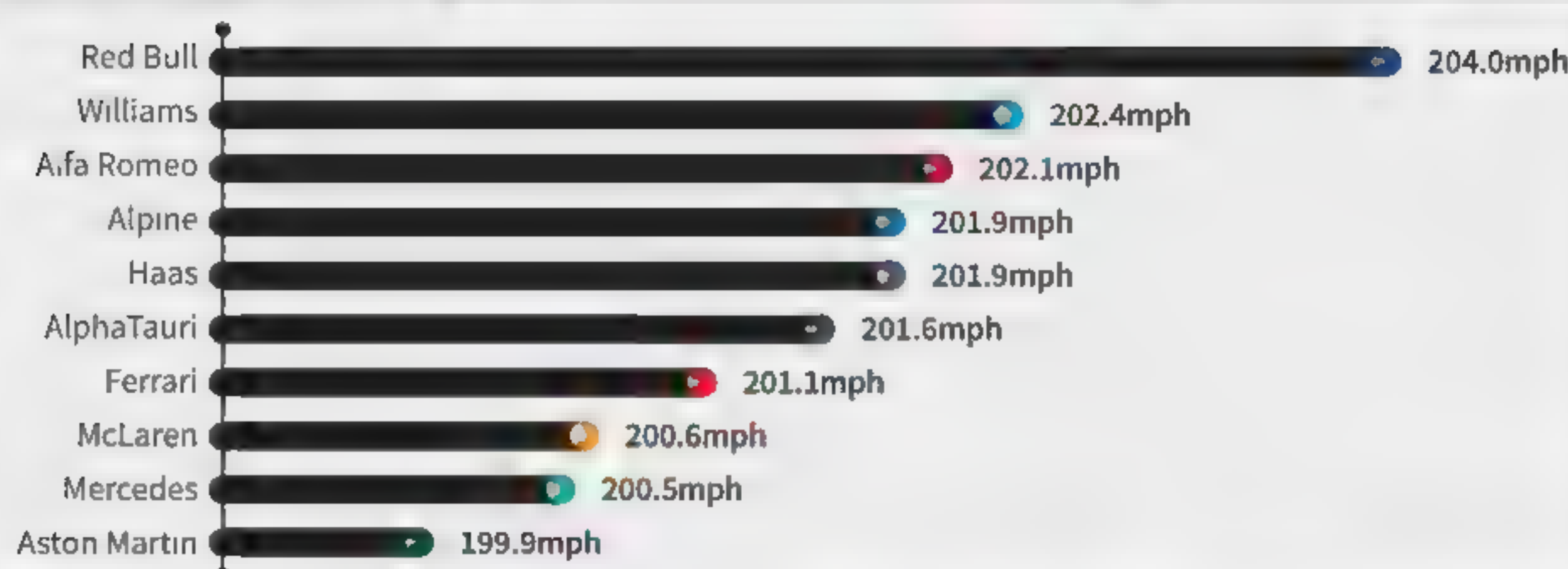
Based on Q1/Q2/Q3 sessions, not sprint races. Events removed when one driver in a team could not record a representative time for reasons outside their control

WINS

Verstappen	10	Verstappen	9
Hamilton	8	Hamilton	7
Bottas	1	Bottas	3
Ocon	1	Leclerc	2
Perez	1	Norris	1
Ricciardo	1		

Poles taken based on qualifying, not sprint races (official F1 scores would be Verstappen 10, Hamilton 5, Bottas 4)

SPEED TRAP (QUALIFYING)



QUALIFYING 1

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Hamilton	1m22.845s
2	Bottas	1m23.117s
3	Verstappen	1m23.322s
4	Perez	1m23.350s
5	Tsunoda	1m23.428s
6	Leclerc	1m23.467s
7	Gasly	1m23.489s
8	Norris	1m23.553s
9	Sainz	1m23.624s
10	Ocon	1m23.764s
11	Ricciardo	1m23.829s
12	Alonso	1m23.846s
13	Stroll	1m24.061s
14	Giovinazzi	1m24.118s
15	Vettel	1m24.225s
16	Latifi	1m24.338s
17	Russell	1m24.423s
18	Raikkonen	1m24.779s
19	Schumacher	1m24.906s
20	Mazepin	1m25.685s

QUALIFYING 2

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Verstappen	1m22.800s
2	Perez	1m23.135s
3	Hamilton	1m23.145s
4	Sainz	1m23.174s
5	Leclerc	1m23.202s
6	Bottas	1m23.246s
7	Norris	1m23.256s
8	Tsunoda	1m23.404s
9	Ocon	1m23.420s
10	Ricciardo	1m23.448s
11	Alonso	1m23.460s
12	Gasly	1m24.043s
13	Stroll	1m24.066s
14	Giovinazzi	1m24.251s
15	Vettel	1m24.305s

QUALIFYING 3

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Verstappen	1m22.109s
2	Hamilton	1m22.480s
3	Norris	1m22.931s
4	Perez	1m22.947s
5	Sainz	1m22.992s
6	Bottas	1m23.036s
7	Leclerc	1m23.122s
8	Tsunoda	1m23.220s
9	Ocon	1m23.389s
10	Ricciardo	1m23.409s

WEATHER Twilight, clear, air 24-25C track 27-30C



STARTING GRID

10 Ricciardo #3 1m23.409s	9 Ocon #31 1m23.389s	8 Tsunoda #22 1m23.220s	7 Leclerc #16 1m23.122s	6 Bottas #77 1m23.036s	5 Sainz #55 1m22.992s	4 Perez #11 1m22.947s	3 Norris #4 1m22.931s	2 Hamilton #44 1m22.480s	1 Verstappen #33 1m22.109s
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RACE RESULTS ROUND 22/22 (58 LAPS - 190.25 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	FINISHTIME	LED	TYRES
1	Max Verstappen (NLD)	Red Bull-Honda	1h30m17.345s	1	Su, Hn, Hn, Sn
2	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	Mercedes	+2.256s	51	Mu, Hu
3	Carlos Sainz Jr (ESP)	Ferrari	+5.173s		Su, Hn
4	Yuki Tsunoda (JPN)	AlphaTauri-Honda	+5.692s		Mu, Hn, Su
5	Pierre Gasly (FRA)	AlphaTauri-Honda	+6.531s		Hn, Mu, Sn
6	Valtteri Bottas (FIN)	Mercedes	+7.463s		Mu, Hu
7	Lando Norris (GBR)	McLaren-Mercedes	+59.200s		Su, Hn, Mn
8	Fernando Alonso (ESP)	Alpine-Renault	+1m01.708s		Hu, Mn
9	Esteban Ocon (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	+1m04.026s		Su, Hu
10	Charles Leclerc (MCO)	Ferrari	+1m06.057s		Su, Hn, Mu
11	Sebastian Vettel (DEU)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+1m07.527s		Mn, Hn
12	Daniel Ricciardo (AUS)	McLaren-Mercedes	-1 lap/+3.581s		Su, Hn, Su
13	Lance Stroll (CAN)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	-1 lap/+7.982s		Mn, Hn, Sn
14	Mick Schumacher (DEU)	Haas-Ferrari	-1 lap/+8.602s		Sn, Hn, Su
15	Sergio Perez (MEX)	Red Bull-Honda	55 laps-engine	6	Su, Hn, Hn, Su
R	Nicholas Latifi (CAN)	Williams-Mercedes	50 laps-accident		Mn, Hn
R	Antonio Giovinazzi (ITA)	Alfa Romeo-Ferrari	33 laps-transmission		Mn, Hn
R	George Russell (GBR)	Williams-Mercedes	26 laps-gearbox		Mn
R	Kimi Raikkonen (FIN)	Alfa Romeo-Ferrari	25 laps-brakes		Mn, Hn
NS	Nikita Mazepin (RUS)	Haas-Ferrari	COVID-19		N/A

FASTEST LAPS

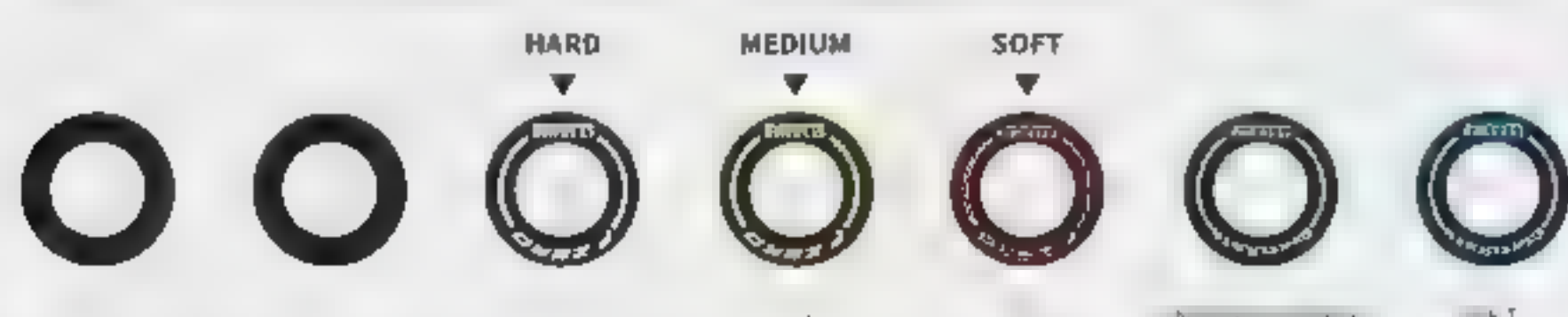
POS	DRIVER	TIME	GAP	LAP
1	Verstappen	1m26.103s	-	39
2	Perez	1m26.419s	+0.316s	51
3	Hamilton	1m26.615s	+0.512s	43
4	Norris	1m26.762s	+0.659s	58
5	Bottas	1m26.862s	+0.759s	51
6	Gasly	1m27.342s	+1.239s	49
7	Tsunoda	1m27.496s	+1.393s	50
8	Alonso	1m27.607s	+1.504s	58
9	Sainz	1m27.618s	+1.515s	51
10	Ocon	1m28.249s	+2.146s	58
11	Vettel	1m28.303s	+2.200s	58
12	Leclerc	1m28.433s	+2.330s	40
13	Stroll	1m28.567s	+2.464s	48
14	Ricciardo	1m28.723s	+2.620s	48
15	Latifi	1m29.293s	+3.190s	30
16	Giovinazzi	1m29.442s	+3.339s	33
17	Schumacher	1m29.457s	+3.354s	42
18	Raikkonen	1m29.698s	+3.595s	23
19	Russell	1m30.647s	+4.544s	23

WEATHER Twilight, clear, air 23-25C track 25-28C

WINNER'S AVERAGE SPEED 126.429mph FASTEST LAP AVERAGE SPEED 137.199mph

TYRES

KEY: H - Hard M - Medium S - Soft I - Intermediate W - Wet n - New set u - Used set

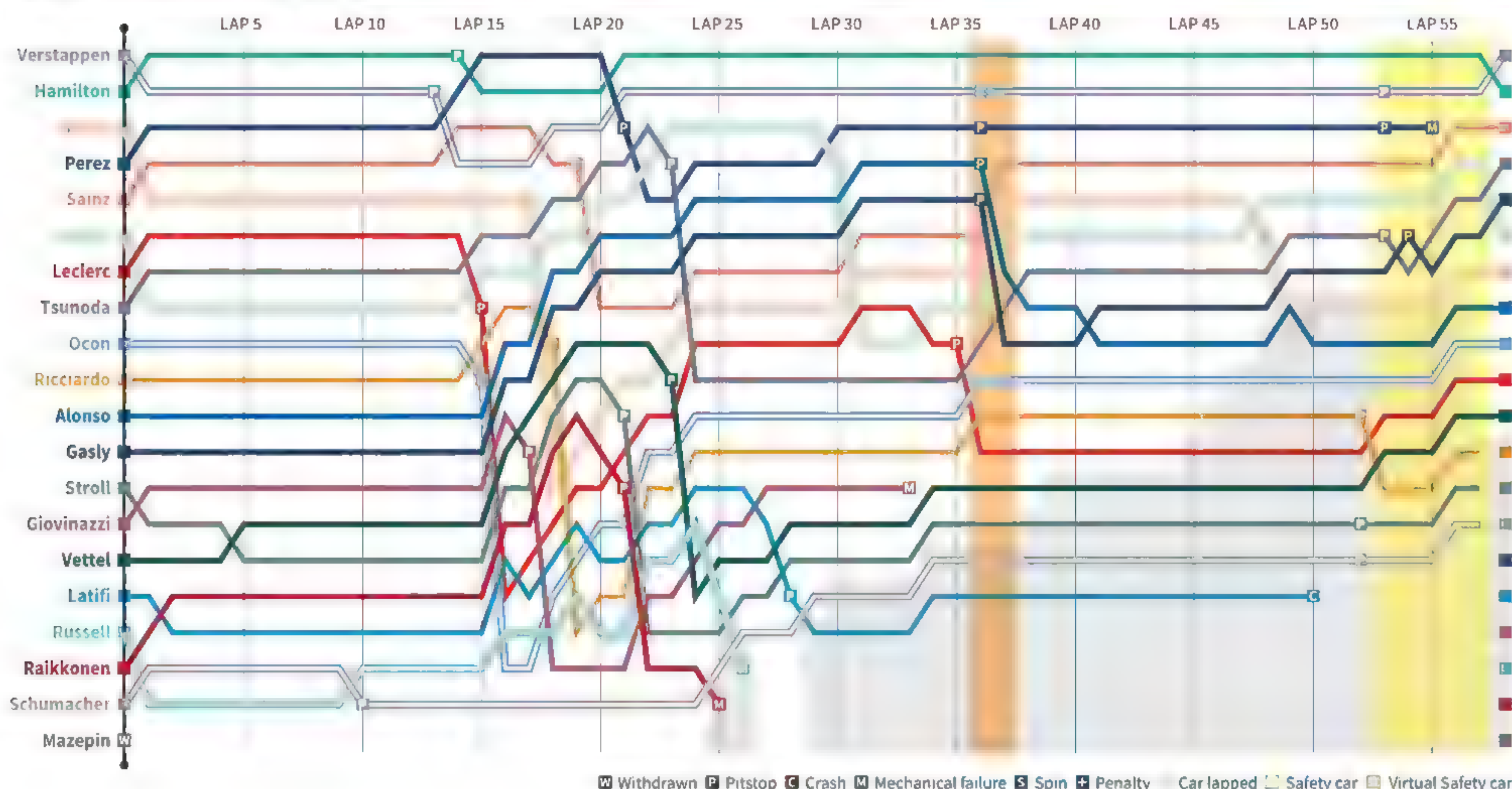


RACE BRIEFING

FP1
JACK AITKEN replaced Russell at Williams



LAP CHART What happened, when



SAINZ STARTS IN PERFECT SUPPORTING CAMEO

All eyes were on Hamilton vs Verstappen, but behind the title duel Carlos Sainz Jr signed off a strong first season at Ferrari in podium-finishing style

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

MERCEDES



LEWIS HAMILTON

Started 2nd — Result 2nd

9 Underwhelming Q3 as Mercedes struggled with soft tyres in a dip in track temperature. Left the door ajar at Turn 6 on lap one, but aced the start and wisely turned out of contact late on with Verstappen, so wasn't penalised for cutting Turn 7. Pace until the safety car was brilliant. Helpless at the restart.



VALTTERI BOTTAS

Started 6th — Result 6th

6 Blamed older engine for his Q3 sixth, which he said cost him 0.2s. At the start he was ambushed by the soft-shod Leclerc, plus Tsunoda, with both AlphaTauris brutally doing this again on the last lap. Ran long before stopping, then battled past Leclerc before gaining with Norris's puncture.

RED BULL



SERGIO PEREZ

Started 4th — Result 15th

9 Incredible team play: Q3 tow was unrehearsed and put up brilliant race defence to defy Hamilton. Verstappen could then close and snooker Mercedes at the VSC and safety car. Late-Q3 final-corner slip, but got past Norris when he fell off at Turn 1. Retired with engine concerns amid fears of extending safety car.



MAX VERSTAPPEN

Started 1st — Result 1st

9 Pole lap was incredible. Made poor race start, while his first-lap pass on Hamilton was late but legal – just. He chased tirelessly even when all looked lost, then didn't hesitate when given a late reprieve, pulling off the title-winning pass even with leg cramp. Weaving on the next straight was naughty.

McLAREN



DANIEL RICCIARDO

Started 10th — Result 12th

6 Not getting new softs fired up in Q3 left him 10th when team-mate took third. Squeezed past Tsunoda at start, then got stuck behind Ocon. Unlucky the VSC kept Gasly and Alonso ahead. After stopping under safety car was the lead lapped runner not allowed back through the pack, trapped in 12th.



LANDO NORRIS

Started 3rd — Result 7th

9 Seventh in opening Q3 runs after coming across a slow Perez at Turn 13, then delivered a mighty lap to start third. Turn 1 solo off let Perez past, which costs him the maximum, but then drove well chasing Sainz, who also got ahead on lap one, until his slow puncture forced a second stop.

ASTON MARTIN



SEBASTIAN VETTEL

Started 15th — Result 11th

6 Hard done by, hitting traffic several times in qualifying, and cleared of impeding Gasly – but decision to stop before his final Q2 run was baffling as he lost tyre temperature when jumping the queue was a better option. Stuck behind Giovinazzi before the Alfa retired, then was happier with his pace.



LANCE STROLL

Started 13th — Result 13th

5 Outqualified his team-mate and Giovinazzi, but fell behind the Alfa at Turn 1. Then Vettel steamed past with DRS to Turn 6 and he spent the rest of the race chasing. Another lapped runner not allowed to pass under the safety car, and was caught in the pack as Sainz and Bottas surged around him.

ALPINE



FERNANDO ALONSO

Started 11th — Result 8th

7 Came across Ricciardo at the end of his final Q2 run, but the Australian was cleared of impeding him. Cost a Q3 berth. In the race, led Gasly up the order as they ran longest of all after starting on the hard tyres. After they gained under the VSC, he scrapped with, and was overcome by, the AlphaTauris.



ESTEBAN OCON

Started 9th — Result 9th

8 Made Q3 when his team-mate didn't, but can't score higher as he was found guilty of impeding Vettel. In the race he maintained position ahead of Ricciardo, then was unfortunate to drop behind Gasly and Alonso due to their VSC gains since he'd been one of the first to stop to take hard tyres.

FERRARI



CHARLES LECLERC

Started 7th — Result 10th

6 Should have beaten Norris in qualifying, but pushing too hard too early on final Q3 lap meant tyres were gone. Boldly passed Bottas at Turn 3 on lap one, chased Norris until a second stop backfired under the VSC. Trapped behind Ricciardo. Falling off behind the rejoining Verstappen was odd.



CARLOS SAINZ JR

Started 5th — Result 3rd

10 Qualified behind Norris but gap was just 0.061s, and breezed past on run to Turn 6 on lap one. Defied Verstappen after Red Bull stopped, then held off Bottas. Got confused under safety car with lapped-cars situation, but just stayed ahead of AlphaTauris after they jumped Bottas.



ALPHATAURI



Started 12th — Result 5th

7 Turn 9 snap and out-lap traffic cost him in Q2. Stayed 12th on lap one and ran long in chase of Alonso, gaining under VSC. Passed Alonso after the Alpine's messy scrap with Tsunoda. Jumped Bottas with fresh softs at restart, after Tsunoda's clunky gearchange stymied the Merc's momentum.



Started 8th — Result 4th

9 Q3 last-corner off cost him sixth. At the start, passed Bottas on similar medium tyres, then managed his rubber nicely in chase of Leclerc. Bottas overcut back ahead but, after great Alonso battle post-VSC, he dived past Bottas at Turn 6 on the final lap, albeit lucky that Bottas avoided contact.

ALFA ROMEO



Started 18th — Result R

4 Not how a legendary F1 career should end, but we doubt he cares. Q1 elimination was poor (his team-mate escaped), down to a Turn 13 sideways moment on his final lap. In the race he gained ground off the start, then retired when an apparent wheelnut problem put him off.



Started 14th — Result R

7 Another strong qualifying when Alfa didn't have Q3 pace to beat Vettel with a better banker lap. In the race he edged past Stroll at Turn 1, and enjoyed his scrap with Vettel before a gearbox problem struck and he was forced to retire – he stopped near the Turn 9 marshals' post and triggered the VSC.

HAAS



Started NS — Result N/A

N/A No mark here because a few hours before the start he tested positive for COVID. Before that, another big qualifying defeat to team-mate, and afterwards said he'd score his season overall at a "four" for "sticking through" tough times, but only a "three" for not being good at adapting when necessary.



Started 19th — Result 14th

7 Beat team-mate by another healthy margin in qualifying. In the race was very slow off the line but squeezed around Russell at Turn 3 on lap one, then was on a contra strategy to Latifi, going long on hards after being the first to pit. Aggressive defence kept him ahead of the Williams before it crashed.

WILLIAMS



Started 16th — Result R

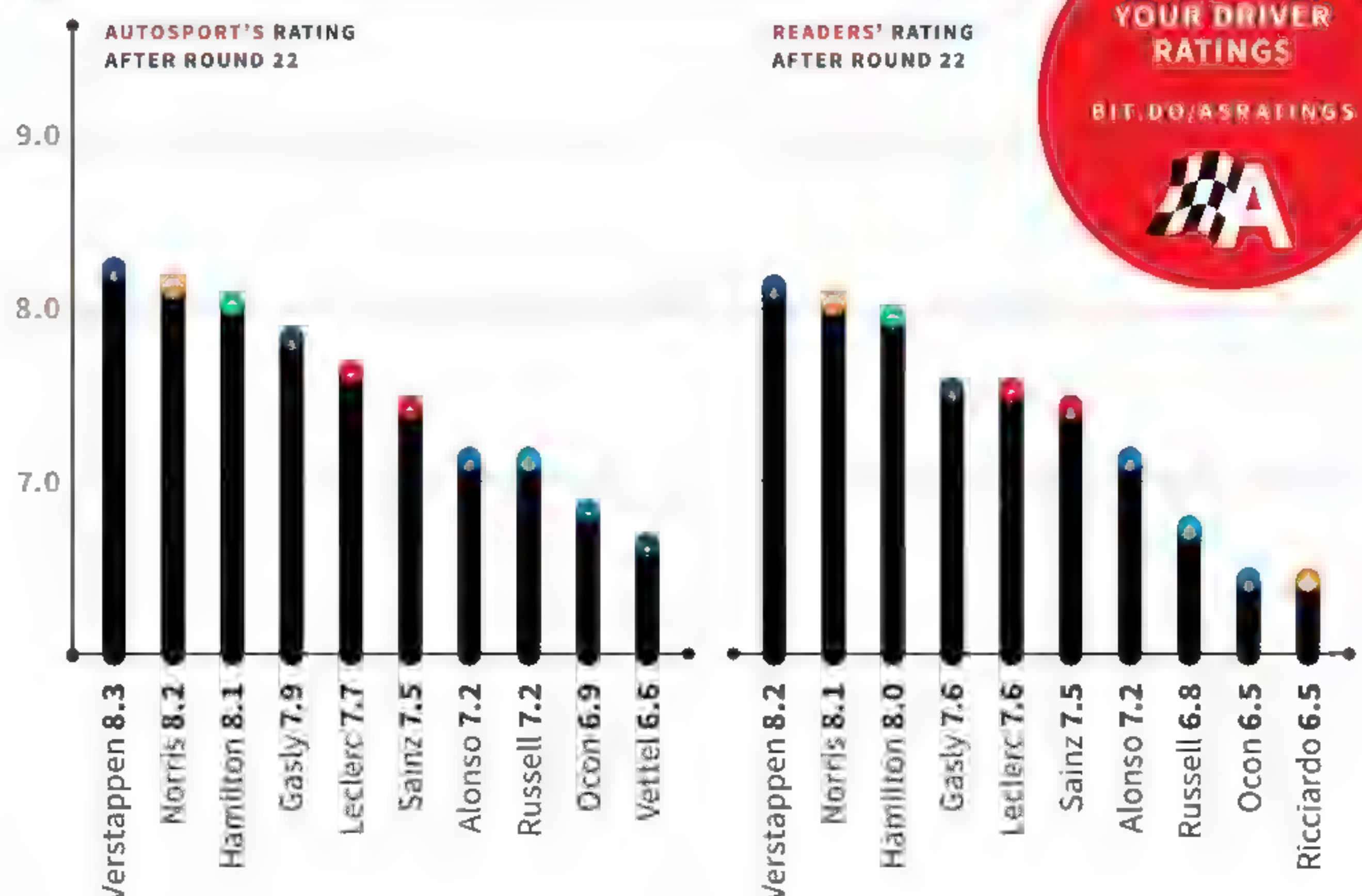
4 Outqualified Russell as both struggled with tyre temperature, but marked down for what happened late in the race. Struggled for pace throughout, then caught Schumacher but couldn't pass. Felt the German's move at Turn 9 was fair but got dirty tyres going wide, caught in turbulence and crashed hard.



Started 17th — Result R

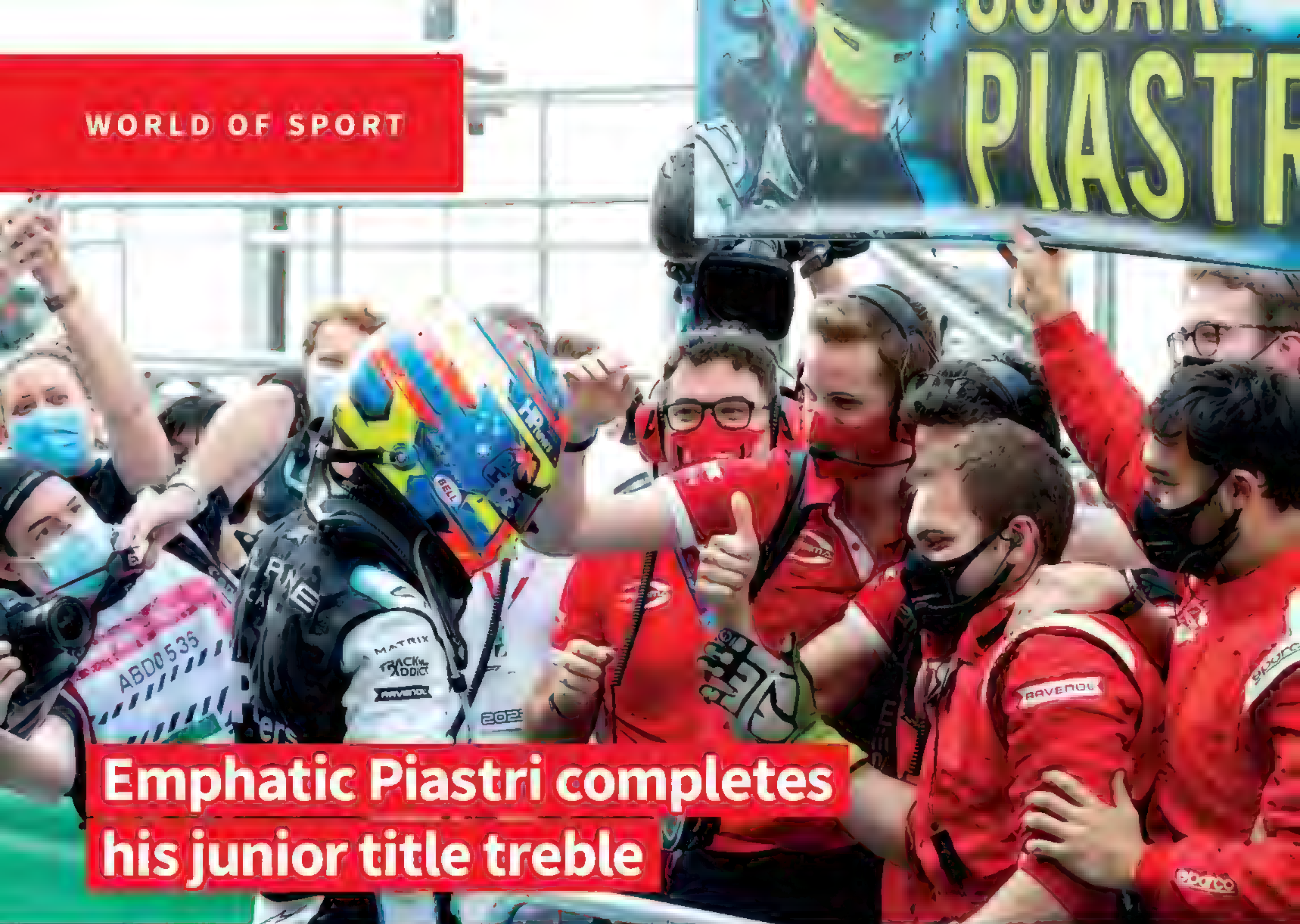
5 Ended stint at Williams with a Q1 exit and defeat to Latifi when last flier went wrong – he needed to let others past at end of prep lap, costing tyre temperature. Slow at start, then slid wide at Turn 5 when already last. Retired when a visor tear-off lodged in airbox and overheated his gearbox.

TOP 10 AVERAGE RATINGS



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Emphatic Piastri completes his junior title treble

FIA FORMULA 2
YAS MARINA (ARE)
11-12 DECEMBER
ROUND 8/8

Oscar Piastri didn't secure the Formula 1 race seat he deserves for next year, but can hold his head high after winning the Formula 2 championship in style in Abu Dhabi.

It may be some time before a junior driver again dominates the pathway to F1 like Australian Piastri. His F2 crowning in his rookie year completed a run of three consecutive championship titles, after the 2019 Formula Renault Eurocup and last season's FIA Formula 3 spoils.

The title seemed a certainty for Piastri. He headed into the finale with a 51.5-point lead over his nearest rival, Prema Racing team-

mate Robert Shwartzman, and clinched the season spoils with a superb drive in the first of the three races. After netting his fifth consecutive feature-race pole position in qualifying, Piastri outlined his skills by surging from 10th in the reversed-grid opening sprint race to third at the flag. He rose to sixth by the first corner, then followed Shwartzman past Dan Ticktum and Liam Lawson, and was not to be denied a chance to celebrate the title on the podium by squeezing past Shwartzman for third with three and a half laps to go.

Jehan Daruvala took the win from the reversed-grid pole, the Carlin driver holding off a frantic mid-race challenge from Virtuosi Racing's Felipe Drugovich — they ran side by side at the banked Turn 9 — to take the flag by 2s, but the biggest celebrations belonged

to new champion Piastri. "It's a massively proud moment for me," he said. "I think I'm the first one to win those three championships in a row. I didn't really come into Formula 2 trying to do three in a row. I just wanted to win F2 for the sake of winning F2, but it looks very nice on my CV."

With the championship pressure released, Piastri cut loose in an eventful second sprint race. He was handed a five-second penalty for forcing Lawson off the road while attempting a pass at Turn 5, before getting caught up in an incident involving Roy Nissany and Juri Vips. Piastri was surprised by Nissany, who sent a move down his inside at Turn 9, and this resulted in contact that put Piastri and Vips out of the race.

F1-bound Guanyu Zhou won the race. The Virtuosi ace inherited the lead from Marcus





COATES

Armstrong, who was forced to pull off the road when his engine cut out on a second safety-car restart after leading from reversed-grid pole. Schwartzman, meanwhile, jumped Ralph Boschung for what was now second place, while Ticktum held off a last-lap challenge from Drugovich for fourth.

Piastrri produced a faultless drive to score his sixth win of the season in the feature race on Sunday. FIA F3 runner-up Jack Doohan had done a fantastic job to qualify on the front row on just his second F2 outing with MP Motorsport but, while battling with Zhou at Turn 9 on the opening lap, he ran wide, got dirt on his tyres and snapped sideways and into the barriers, causing an early safety car. Just behind, Liam Lawson completed a 360-degree spin when he also ran wide while fighting Schwartzman.

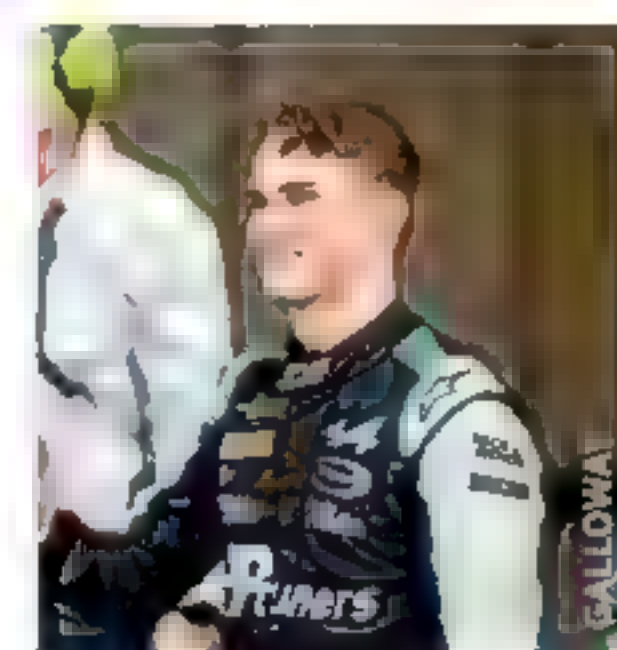
Once the race went green, Piastrri led Zhou and Schwartzman until they made early pitstops to get off the option super-soft tyres. Theo Pourchaire now led from Drugovich, this duo on the alternate strategy. They pitted in the closing stages, and Drugovich fought past Pourchaire on the super-softs, while the pair also swooped on the medium-shod Schwartzman.

Drugovich therefore completed a Virtuosi 2-3, while up ahead Piastrri beat Zhou to the chequered flag by 3.3s. Pourchaire was fourth ahead of Schwartzman, and Ticktum held off super-soft-tyred Armstrong for sixth.

TOM HOWARD

RESULTS ROUND 8/8, YAS MARINA (ARE), 11-12 DEC FEATURE RACE (33 LAPS – 108.217 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	TIME
1	Oscar Piastrri (AUS)	Prema Racing	58m14.400s
2	Guanyu Zhou (CHN)	UNI Virtuosi Racing	+3.288s
3	Felipe Drugovich (BRA)	UNI Virtuosi Racing	+8.242s
4	Theo Pourchaire (FRA)	ART Grand Prix	+9.977s
5	Robert Schwartzman (RUS)	Prema Racing	+13.333s
6	Dan Ticktum (GBR)	Carlin	+19.166s
7	Marcus Armstrong (NZL)	DAMS	+19.775s
8	Juri Vips (EST)	Hitech Grand Prix	+22.555s
9	Ralph Boschung (CHE)	Campos Racing	+26.415s
10	Richard Verschoor (NLD)	Charouz Racing	+27.242s
11	Jehan Daruvala (IND)	Carlin	+30.007s
12	Bent Viscaal (NLD)	Trident	+32.619s
13	Roy Nissany (ISR)	DAMS	+37.305s
14	Clement Novalak (FRA)	MP Motorsport	+37.836s
15	Christian Lundgaard (DNK)	ART Grand Prix	+40.446s
16	Guilherme Samaia (BRA)	Charouz Racing	+41.040s
17	Marino Sato (JPN)	Trident	+42.341s
18	Olli Caldwell (GBR)	Campos Racing	+43.846s
19	Alessio Deledda (ITA)	HWA Racelab	+1m20.339s
20	Liam Lawson (NZL)	Hitech Grand Prix	29 laps-mechanical
R	Jake Hughes (GBR)	HWA Racelab	21 laps-technical
R	Jack Doohan (AUS)	MP Motorsport	0 laps-accident



QUALIFYING

1 Piastrri 1m35.077s;
2 Doohan 1m35.290s;
3 Zhou 1m35.348s;
4 Schwartzman 1m35.360s;
5 Boschung 1m35.496s;
6 Pourchaire 1m35.504s;
7 Lawson 1m35.511s;
8 Drugovich 1m35.612s;
9 Ticktum 1m35.618s;
10 Daruvala 1m35.821s;
11 Armstrong 1m35.855s;
12 Lundgaard 1m36.016s;
13 Nissany 1m36.080s;
14 Sato 1m36.241s;
15 Vips 1m36.282s;
16 Verschoor 1m36.293s;
17 Viscaal 1m36.312s;
18 Hughes 1m36.462s;
19 Caldwell 1m36.570s;
20 Novalak 1m36.722s;
21 Samaia 1m36.741s;
22 Deledda 1m38.657s.

Winner's average speed 111.487mph. **Fastest lap** Pourchaire 1m37.789s, 120.803mph.

SPRINT RACE 1 (23 LAPS – 75.402 MILES)

GRID Decided by result of qualifying, with top 10 reversed.

1 Daruvala 38m33.605s; **2 Drugovich +2.079s;** **3 Piastrri +2.915s;** **4 Schwartzman +3.581s;** **5 Lawson +11.243s;**
6 Ticktum +12.978s; **7 Pourchaire +14.120s;** **8 Zhou +15.595s;** **9 Boschung +17.081s;** **10 Armstrong +17.539s;**
11 Doohan +18.530s; **12 Vips +19.270s;** **13 Viscaal +27.226s;** **14 Nissany +29.927s;** **15 Lundgaard +32.099s;**
16 Samaia +32.636s; **17 Novalak +37.036s;** **18 Deledda +48.948s;** **19 Sato +54.333s;** **20 Caldwell +1m43.561s;**
R Hughes 19 laps-damage; **R Verschoor 11 laps-technical.**

Winner's average speed 117.326mph. **Fastest lap** Caldwell 1m39.070s, 119.241mph.

SPRINT RACE 2 (23 LAPS – 75.402 MILES)

GRID Decided by result of Sprint race 1, with top 10 finishers reversed.

1 Zhou 43m27.096s; **2 Schwartzman +3.413s;** **3 Boschung +9.772s;** **4 Ticktum +14.296s;** **5 Drugovich +14.501s;**
6 Lawson +17.088s; **7 Daruvala +19.839s;** **8 Doohan +21.086s;** **9 Pourchaire +21.942s;** **10 Viscaal +22.722s;**
11 Verschoor +25.881s; **12 Samaia +30.899s;** **13 Hughes +31.463s;** **14 Novalak +31.867s;** **15 Caldwell +32.236s;**
16 Sato +37.022s; **17 Nissany +1m06.754s;** **18 Lundgaard -1 lap;** **R Armstrong 10 laps-technical;**
R Vips 6 laps-collision; **R Piastrri 6 laps-collision;** **R Deledda 2 laps-accident.**

Winner's average speed 104.118mph. **Fastest lap** Nissany 1m37.445s, 121.230mph.

CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Piastrri 252.5; **2 Schwartzman 192;** **3 Zhou 183;** **4 Ticktum 159.5;** **5 Pourchaire 140;** **6 Vips 120;**
7 Daruvala 113; **8 Drugovich 105;** **9 Lawson 103;** **10 Boschung 59.5.**





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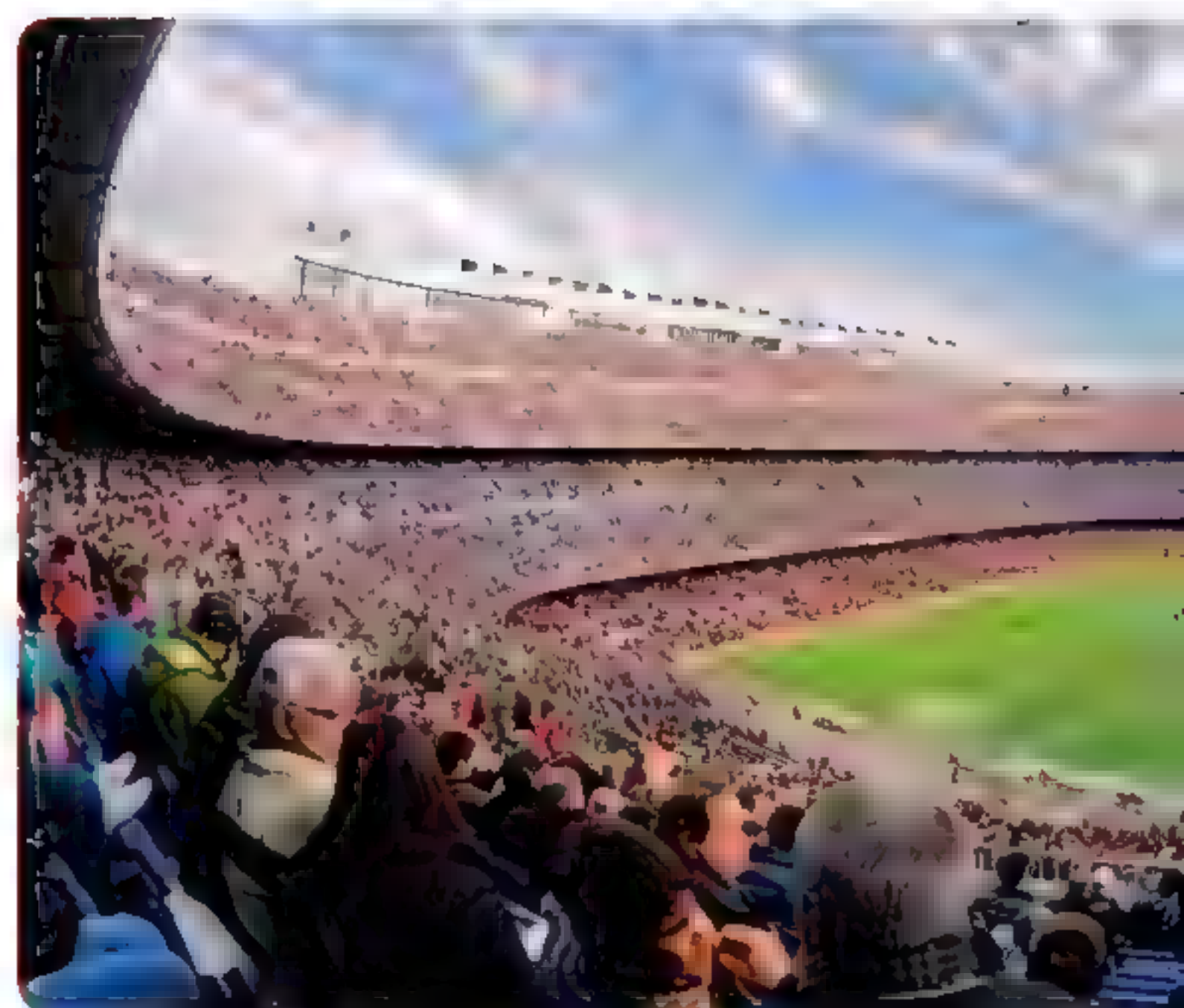
Barcelona is a rare example of a major city with sunny beaches to relax by. Most tourists head for the central Barceloneta Beach – which is the largest in the city. If you're willing to venture a few blocks to the north, though, you'll find some quieter, but equally tranquil beaches to relax by.

Don't settle for your only experience of authentic Spanish food being a stroll around a foreign supermarket. The Mercat de la Boqueria is where you'll find a true taste of Spain and Barcelona. If you're staying in an apartment or camping near the circuit, this is where you'll want to shop for authentic Spanish ham and meats, fresh fruit and veg, and delicious fish. It claims it's the 'best market in the world'... and there's only one way to find out.

Not sure where to start your Barcelona adventure? Reach for the sky and get a birds' eye view of the city with the enormous cable car. Stretching 750m across the city, visitors leave from Montjuïc Park, and ascend into the Montjuïc Hill, where you will be greeted with an incredible panoramic view of the city.

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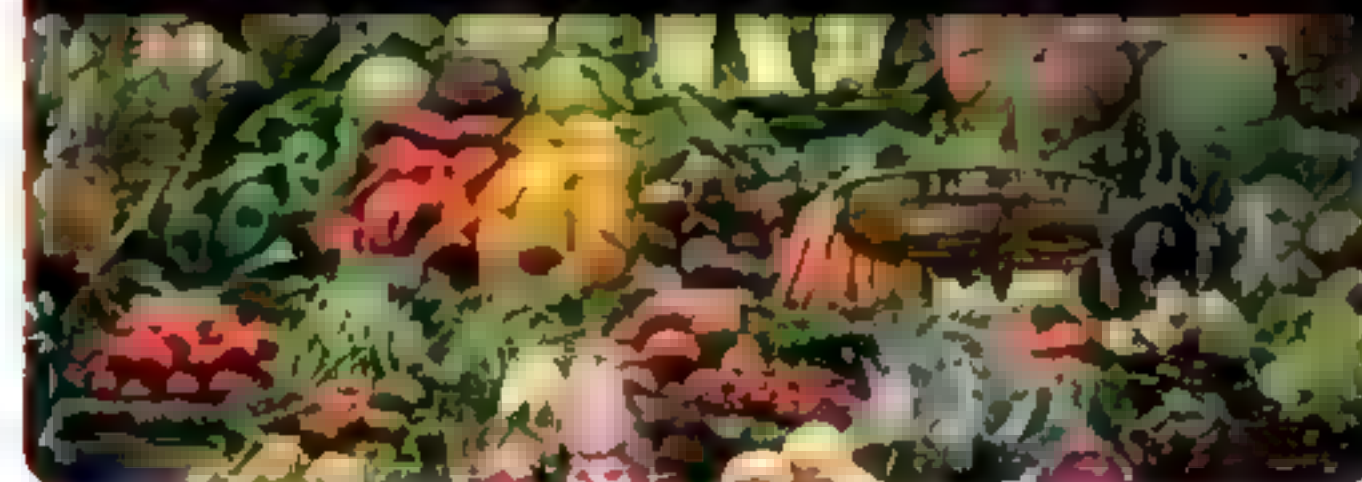


Nova Mar Bella Beach



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Mercat de la Boqueria



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4. Montjuïc Cable Car

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1. Camp Nou

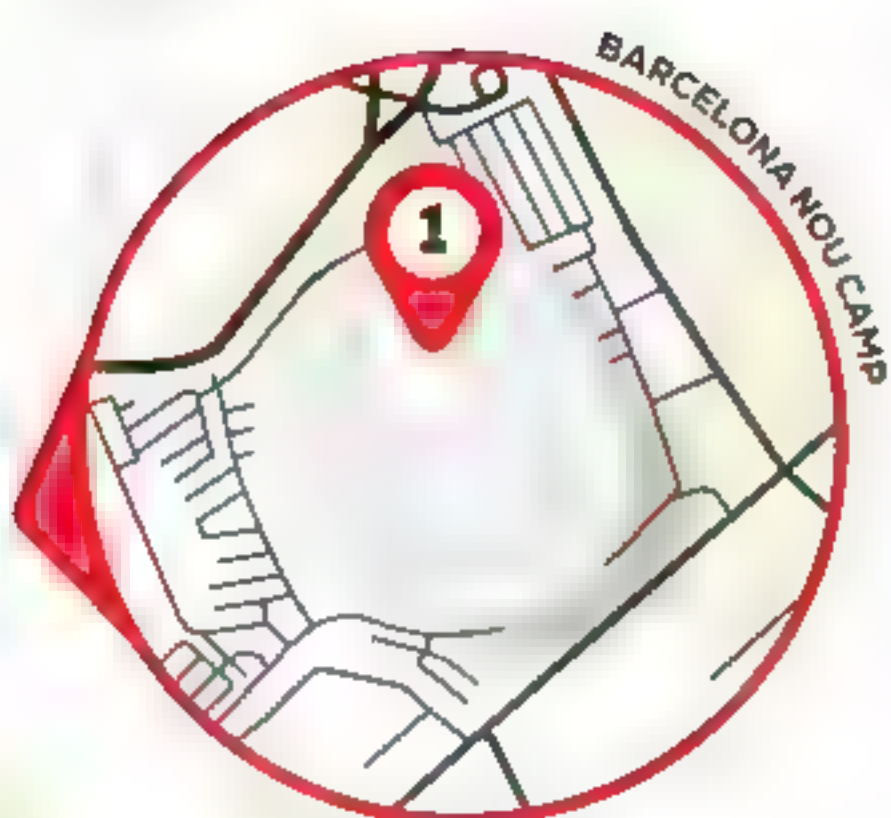
FC Barcelona is hailed as one of the world's all-time great football clubs. And they play in an arena fit for that title. The 100,000-capacity stadium is the biggest in Europe, and has been the stage for some of the sport's greatest matches.

Tours of the ground include visits to the changing rooms, tunnel and the first team dugout, plus a trip to the club museum. The Spanish Grand Prix weekend will be at the conclusion of the La Liga campaign, and with Barcelona's struggles this season, the eyes of the sporting world will be on the city.

5 EXTRA THINGS TO DO IN BARCELONA

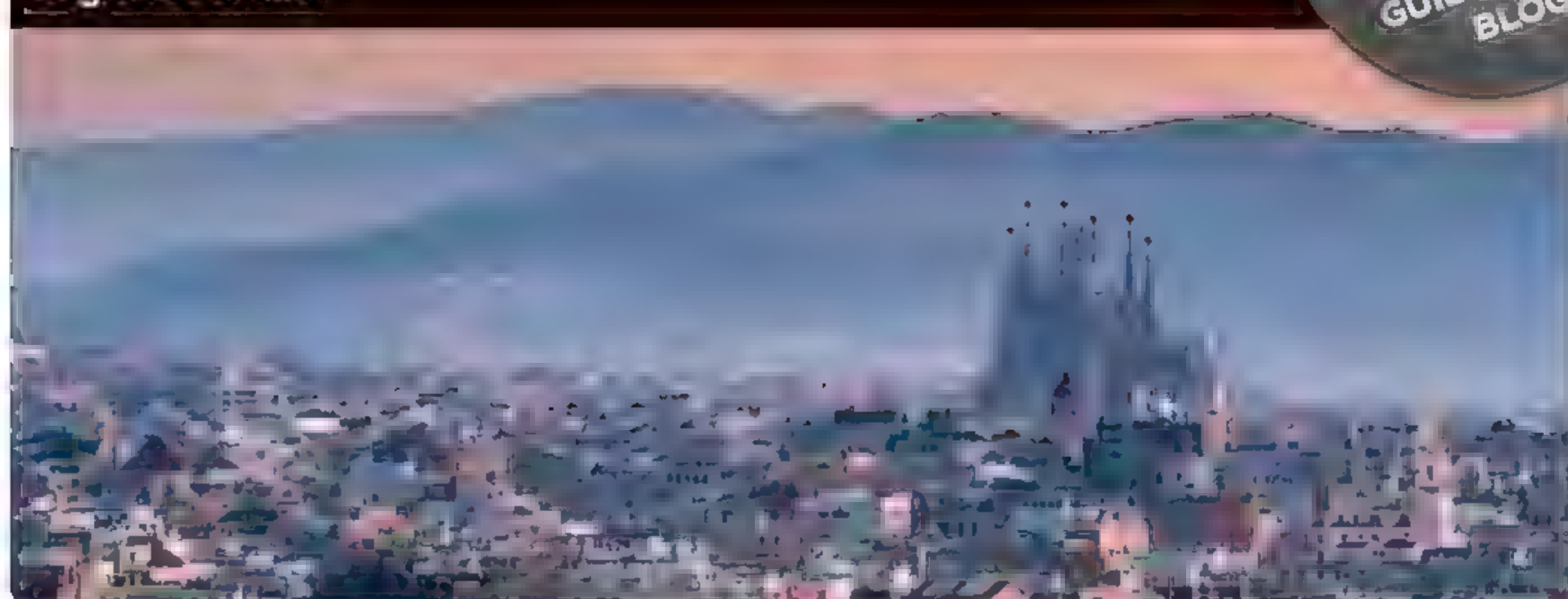


Barcelona



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Sagrada Familia



It's hard to go more than five minutes in Barcelona without stumbling across one of Antoni Gaudi's architectural masterpieces. But La Sagrada Familia is surely a grand attraction. Towering over the city, the unfinished basilica has been 138 years in the making, due to be completed in 2026. It's one of the sights to remember of any trip to Barcelona, but if you're after that perfect photo, head to the rooftop bar at nearby Hotel Ayre, where you can enjoy a drink while admiring the intricate designs.

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AUTOSPORT'S



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James Newbold, Marcus Simmons, Damien Smith, Rachit Thukral, Jim Utter,
Andrew van Leeuwen, Gary Watkins, Megan White

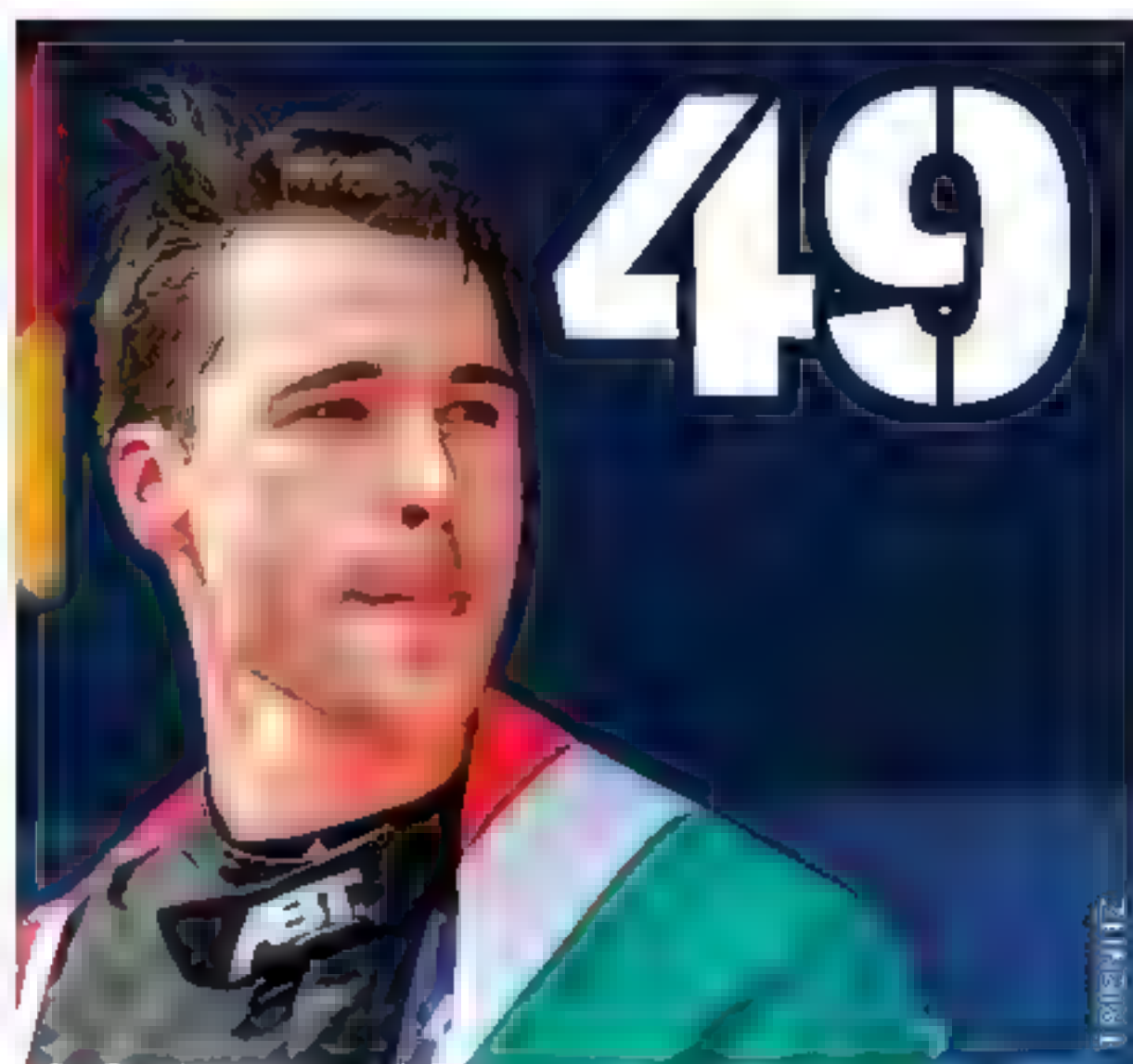
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VISIT [AUTOSPORT.COM/TOPIC/TOP-50-DRIVERS-OF-2021](https://www.autosport.com/topic/top-50-drivers-of-2021)



GUANYU ZHOU

**3rd in FIA Formula 2 Championship;
1st in Asian Formula 3**

He may have missed out on the Formula 2 title, but Guanyu Zhou achieved his goal of becoming a Formula 1 driver by joining Alfa Romeo for next year. He entered the year under pressure, stating that his third season in F2 would be his last. After winning the Asian F3 title, he made his experience show in the revamped F2 format of three races per weekend, delivering slick, fast and controlled performances from the first round to head the standings until mid-season at Silverstone. Ultimately Oscar Piastri had the edge on him, but feature race wins in Bahrain and at Silverstone underlined that Zhou has the skills worthy for F1 graduation.



KELVIN VAN DER LINDE

3rd in DTM; 2nd in Spa 24 Hours

Kelvin van der Linde was easily one of the most consistent drivers of the year in the DTM and in a completely different league to others in the Audi stable. The South African put his extensive GT3 experience to good use, establishing a significant championship lead in the first half of the season. If it wasn't for a technical problem at the Lausitzring that denied him a surefire win, the title standings may have looked markedly different at the end of the year. Ultimately, he was simply too desperate to win back the points lead from Liam Lawson in the title run-in, and there's no excuse for his actions at the Norisring.



DRIES VANTHOOR

**—RE-ENTRY
1st in GT World Challenge Europe Sprint Cup;
1st in GTWCE**

The younger Vanthoor brother was again imperious at the wheel of an Audi R8 LMS GT3. There wasn't anyone faster among the German manufacturer's roster of factory drivers, and there probably isn't anyone quicker in GT3 racing right now. Dries Vanthoor's talents were rewarded by a second straight GT World Challenge Europe Sprint Cup title together with Charles Weerts at WRT, and this time they won the overall GTWCE crown as well. But 2021 was also significant for the 23-year-old because he proved he's not just a one-trick pony, with a one-off in the HubAuto GTE Pro Porsche at the Le Mans 24 Hours. He promptly put it on pole ahead of all the factory cars.



How Ehrlacher triumphed again

"Yann hasn't had a single DNF this year. I think that stands out and that's why we're here with the trophy again." That was the verdict of Cyan Racing boss Fredrik Wahlen on why Yann Ehrlacher claimed a second successive World Touring Car Cup in 2021.

No one stands head-and-shoulders above the rest in WTCR, because the nature of Balance of Performance and compensation weight racing just won't allow it, such are the swings in form from round to round. Flattening out the troughs is the key to title glory, just as it is in the British Touring Car Championship, and no team does it better than Cyan with its Chinese Lynk & Cos. Only one of Ehrlacher's two race victories was from a 'real' race unaffected by partially reversed grids, but that performance from pole position at Adria stretched his points lead almost out of the reach of his

rivals before the final weekend at Sochi. He also won at Estoril early in the season, on a weekend when Lynk & Co had angrily called out the WTCR for its BoP management. Awkward. Politics is rife in this corner of the tin-top globe.

But what's great about the WTCR is the mix of talent, from a spring of youth that includes Ehrlacher, Mikel Azcona and Luca Engstler, to the oak maturity of such as Yvan Muller, 52 – who failed to win a race but was still fourth in points – and 59-year-old Gabriele Tarquini. The Italian claimed a reversed-grid win at Motorland Aragon before he took the decision to retire at season's end. For perspective, his 38-race F1 career was already over and he'd already conquered the BTCC when Ehrlacher was born in 1996. Tarquini's time is finally up; the champion's has only just begun.



47

JOHAN KRISTOFFERSSON

▲ UP 2

1st in World Rallycross; 1st in Extreme E

The Swede left it late to wrap up his fourth World Rallycross crown. He matched the points tally of Timmy Hansen, but three wins overcame his rival's brace to get the job done. While the title was largely decided by a final-round penalty handed to Hansen, it mustn't be overlooked that Kristoffersson lost the lead in Spain for an unconnected data logger, endured a puncture in Sweden, and won at Spa after grabbing an extinguisher to put out a fire on his Audi S1! He was also top of a class that included Sebastien Loeb, Carlos Sainz Sr and Hansen during a maiden Extreme E campaign in which he and Molly Taylor have so far won all but one event.



YIFEI YE

▲ UP 1

1st in European Le Mans Series; 1st in Asian Le Mans Series

If anyone had suggested 12 months ago that this Chinese driver would make this list, they would have been laughed out of the paddock. Yet it would have been difficult to leave Yifei Ye out after an impressive maiden season of sportscar racing in LMP2 in 2021. It wasn't so much what he did on the way to winning both the Asian and European Le Mans Series with G-Drive and WRT respectively, though he did impress. Rather it was his performance on his debut at the Le Mans 24 Hours that made it impossible to overlook him. Ye was superb: he was within hundredths of being the fastest LMP2 driver on just about every metric.



YANN EHRLACHER

▼ DOWN 1

1st in World Touring Car Cup

Back-to-back world titles and still only 25. Yann Ehrlacher appears to have everything going for him to match and perhaps surpass his uncle Yvan Muller as one of touring car racing's most decorated drivers. There was little that was spectacular about the Frenchman's campaign this time in the World Touring Car Cup. But just as in 2020, uncle Yvan had his back, and in Cyan Racing the pair, plus rapid Uruguayan Santiago Urrutia and ex-World Touring Car Champion Thed Bjork, benefited from the best-drilled team. The Lynk & Co was consistently the best car too. Ehrlacher only won twice, but scored in all 16 races – and that's what wins you tin-top titles.



ROBIN FRIJNS

—RE-ENTRY

1st in World Endurance Championship (LMP2);
5th in Formula E

Robin Frijns entered a new category in 2021 and did what he's always done: win races. He added a clutch of silverware in LMP2 to the bagfuls he's won in every category in which he's regularly competed, from Formula BMW to the DTM. He'd made one LMP2 appearance prior to the start of the season, but at its end he was a world champion and a Le Mans winner with WRT. And arguably the WEC's fastest LMP2 driver: he put in two superlative performances in Bahrain. Frijns didn't win races in Formula E this season, but he was a championship contender able to race – if not qualify – with anyone.



ASH SUTTON

▲UP 2

1st in British Touring Car Championship

Last year, BMR's redesign of the Laser Tools Racing Infiniti Q50 had not been fully honed prior to the BTCC season, owing to the loss of testing amid the COVID pandemic. Ash Sutton was drawn into a straight fight for the title with Colin Turkington, and he made some mistakes. In 2021, the refined Infiniti hit the ground running, and Sutton spent most of the year defending a points advantage. This he did beautifully, despite arriving at the bulk of events with the full 75kg of success ballast. Sutton's performance in managing the sporting format of each weekend was a masterclass, and he fully deserved to seal a third title one race early.



WILL POWER

▼DOWN 12

9th in IndyCar Series

It's a rare season when Will Power scores only one win, but that's how it was in 2021, and unlike the previous time it happened – 2015 – it couldn't just be put down to outrageous misfortune. Six years ago he scored six poles; this year the scintillating pace that has become his hallmark was absent at some mid-season events as Power struggled to adapt his driving style to an altered generic set-up at Team Penske. There were also a couple of possible wins that slipped away through no fault of his own (as always). But the fastest IndyCar driver of his generation and one of the fastest of all time needs to up his percentages in 2022.



DENNIS HAUGER

—RE-ENTRY

1st in FIA Formula 3 Championship

From the first feature race at Barcelona, Dennis Hauger dominated the 2021 F3 season, taking four wins and nine podiums on his way to the title. He suffered a torrid 2020, in which he finished down in 17th, but the Norwegian's arrival at Prema marked a turning point in his fortunes. He took the rostrum in five of the seven feature races, started on pole in three of them, and had four fastest laps to his name. The Red Bull junior also proved his mettle as a driver who can charge through the pack when necessary, as demonstrated in the Austrian sprint races: he started 12th in both yet finished first and third.

TOP 50
2020
DRIVER
LIST

- 1 Lewis Hamilton
- 2 Max Verstappen
- 3 Antonio Felix da Costa
- 4 Pierre Gasly
- 5 Charles Leclerc
- 6 Josef Newgarden
- 7 Daniel Ricciardo
- 8 Scott Dixon
- 9 Sebastien Ogier
- 10 Rene Rast
- 11 Sergio Perez
- 12 Valtteri Bottas
- 13 Scott McLaughlin
- 14 Kevin Harvick
- 15 George Russell
- 16 Sebastien Buemi
- 17 Mike Conway
- 18 Carlos Sainz Jr
- 19 Lando Norris
- 20 Mitch Evans
- 21 Nico Muller
- 22 Colton Herta
- 23 Thierry Neuville
- 24 Denny Hamlin
- 25 Mick Schumacher
- 26 Stoffel Vandoorne
- 27 Yuki Tsunoda
- 28 Chase Elliott
- 29 Elfyn Evans
- 30 Will Power
- 31 Callum Iott
- 32 Nyck de Vries
- 33 Ryo Hirakawa
- 34 Patricio O'Ward
- 35 Jean-Eric Vergne
- 36 Filipe Albuquerque
- 37 Daniil Kvyat
- 38 Nick Cassidy
- 39 Kimi Raikkonen
- 40 Cam Waters
- 41 Ott Tanak
- 42 Dane Cameron
- 43 Oscar Piastri
- 44 Yann Ehrlacher
- 45 Ash Sutton
- 46 Theo Pourchaire
- 47 Shane van Gisbergen
- 48 Raffaele Marciello
- 49 Johan Kristoffersson
- 50 Nick Tandy



40

NIREI FUKUZUMI

2nd in Super GT; 2nd in Super Formula

Besides dominant champion Tomoki Nojiri, there was only one other driver who won a race in the dry all season in Super Formula – and that was Nirei Fukuzumi. After being denied a first series victory by a puncture at Suzuka, he got the monkey off his back at Sugo, and then added a second triumph in the Suzuka finale to jump to second in the standings. In his third season with Dandelion Racing, he settled nicely into the role of team leader after Naoki Yamamoto's departure to fellow Honda squad Nakajima Racing. With Nojiri in the Team Aguri Honda, he also only just missed out on Super GT title glory.



SEBASTIAN VETTEL

—RE-ENTRY

12th in Formula 1 World Championship

In an up-and-down season, there were a few flashes of the late-Ferrari-era Sebastian Vettel – clattering into Esteban Ocon in Bahrain, spinning by himself at the Silverstone restart, another spin at Zandvoort, unsettled by the nearby Robert Kubica – but he seemed revitalised in new surroundings. After taking a few races to gain confidence with the Aston package, he produced a standout drive in Monaco where his experience paid off handsomely. Then came the podium in Baku and (lost) near-win in Hungary, where a small error going too fast into the pits meant he missed the slim chance to undercut Ocon.



EDOARDO MORTARA

—RE-ENTRY

2nd in Formula E

Formula E is a funny new world. Edoardo Mortara finished runner-up in the standings, scored the second-biggest weekend points haul of any driver when he took a win and a third place in Puebla, and snared a further two podiums. But for his third appearance in the Top 50 he lands his lowest ranking. That's based partly on his car – Venturi's Mercedes customer powertrain was clearly the pick of the crop, which meant good results were compulsory. While the title-deciding startline crash in Berlin was not his fault, his mid-pack position on the grid that day was reflective of frequent uninspiring qualifying pace.



FELIPE NASR

—RE-ENTRY

1st in IMSA SportsCar Championship

If anyone had doubts that Nasr was right up there among the best sportscar drivers of his day, two things happened in 2021 to put them right. He won a second IMSA title, and landed a drive with Penske and Porsche for next year and beyond. Nasr was the stand-out driver at the wheel of a Daytona Prototype international this season on the way to the title with Pipo Derani and the Action Express Cadillac squad. The only thing missing from his season was a victory in one of the big enduros. His prowess was clearly noted at Penske HQ. His deal was done, though remains unannounced, before the season's end.



THIERRY NEUVILLE

▼DOWN 13

3rd in World Rally Championship

Had his Hyundai i20 been more reliable, Thierry Neuville would have pushed Toyota's Sebastien Ogier all the way in the World Rally Championship title fight. The fragile Hyundai was the year's fastest car, and when the Belgian clicked with it he was unstoppable. Dominant victories on home asphalt in Ypres, followed by one of the finest drives of the season in Spain, were the highlights and made even more impressive by working with a new co-driver in Martijn Wydaeghe. Neuville should have won in Portugal and on the return of the famous Safari Rally, only to be robbed of likely victory by a rear-suspension failure on the final day.



35 FILIPE ALBUQUERQUE

▲UP 1

**2nd in IMSA SportsCar Championship;
1st in Daytona 24 Hours; 5th in World
Endurance Championship (LMP2)**

Filipe Albuquerque, once again, garnered success in both prototype codes: he was a multiple race winner in DPi and LMP2 with Wayne Taylor Racing and United Autosports respectively. He made an immediate impact on his full-time return to IMSA with victory at Daytona – his second – in the WTR Acura. He and Ricky Taylor couldn't have come much closer to the title: Taylor was briefly ahead of Felipe Nasr at the penultimate corner of the Road Atlanta finale and, under the pre-2021 points system, they would have only lost the championship on countback. He started with a bang in the WEC, too. Albuquerque headed the LMP2 times in every session at Spa and starred in the race.



TOP 50 NEW ENTRIES

KYLE LARSON

34th in 2020 NASCAR Cup;
6th in 2019 NASCAR Cup

JAKE DENNIS

21st in 2020 Intercontinental GT
Challenge; 6th in 2019 Blancpain
Endurance Series; 17th in 2019 DTM

ALESSANDRO PIER GUIDI

1st in 2020 GT World Challenge
Europe Endurance; 6th in 2019-20
World Endurance Championship
(GTE Pro); 1st in 2019 European
Le Mans Series (GTE); 2nd in
2018-19 World Endurance
Championship (GTE Pro)

OSCAR PIASTRI

1st in 2020 FIA Formula 3
Championship; 1st in 2019
Formula Renault Eurocup

TOMOKI NOJIRI

5th in 2020 Super Formula and
Super GT; 4th in 2019 Super
Formula; 10th in 2019 Super GT

KALLE ROVANPERA

5th in 2020 World Rally
Championship; 1st in 2019 World
Rally Championship (WRC-2 Pro)

LIAM LAWSON

5th in 2020 FIA Formula 3
Championship; 11th in 2019 FIA
Formula 3 Championship; 2nd in
2019 Euroformula Open

NIREI FUKUZUMI

5th in 2020 Super GT;
8th in 2020 Super Formula;
1st in 2019 Super GT;
7th in 2019 Super Formula

DENNIS HAUGER

17th in 2020 FIA Formula 3
Championship; 1st in 2019
Italian Formula 4; 2nd in
2019 ADAC Formula 4

YIFEI YE

1st in 2020 Euroformula Open;
21st in 2019 FIA Formula 3
Championship

KELVIN VAN DER LINDE

4th in 2020 GT World Challenge
Europe Endurance and Sprint;
1st in 2019 ADAC GT Masters

GUANYU ZHOU

6th in 2020 FIA Formula 2
Championship; 7th in 2019
FIA Formula 2 Championship



LIAM LAWSON

—RE-ENTRY

2nd in DTM;
9th in FIA Formula 2 Championship

Few could have imagined Liam Lawson turning up at Monza and winning his first race in a GT3 car, but the Ferrari-mounted Red Bull junior surpassed all expectations in his maiden DTM campaign. By the end of the year he was a well-rounded driver with the upper hand over more experienced rivals. Maximilian Gotz may have officially earned a place among DTM's hall of fame, but Lawson was the moral champion. The 19-year-old had a decent F2 rookie season too, winning the Bahrain opener as well as a Monaco race on the road before exclusion.



ESTEBAN OCON

—RE-ENTRY

11th in Formula 1 World Championship

Becoming the 111th winner in the world championship is naturally the high point of his year, given his superb drive under race-long pressure from Sebastian Vettel at the Hungaroring once circumstances had swung sensationally his way. That, and his Portugal, Turkey and Qatar one/no-stop performances, demonstrate how high he can reach, but he lacked consistency. At other events, particularly in the second half of the year, pace on ageing tyres was a problem. The main reason he's behind Fernando Alonso is that once his team-mate hit form, Ocon went from 4-1 up in qualifying after Monaco to a narrow defeat, with three Q1 exits to the Spaniard's two.

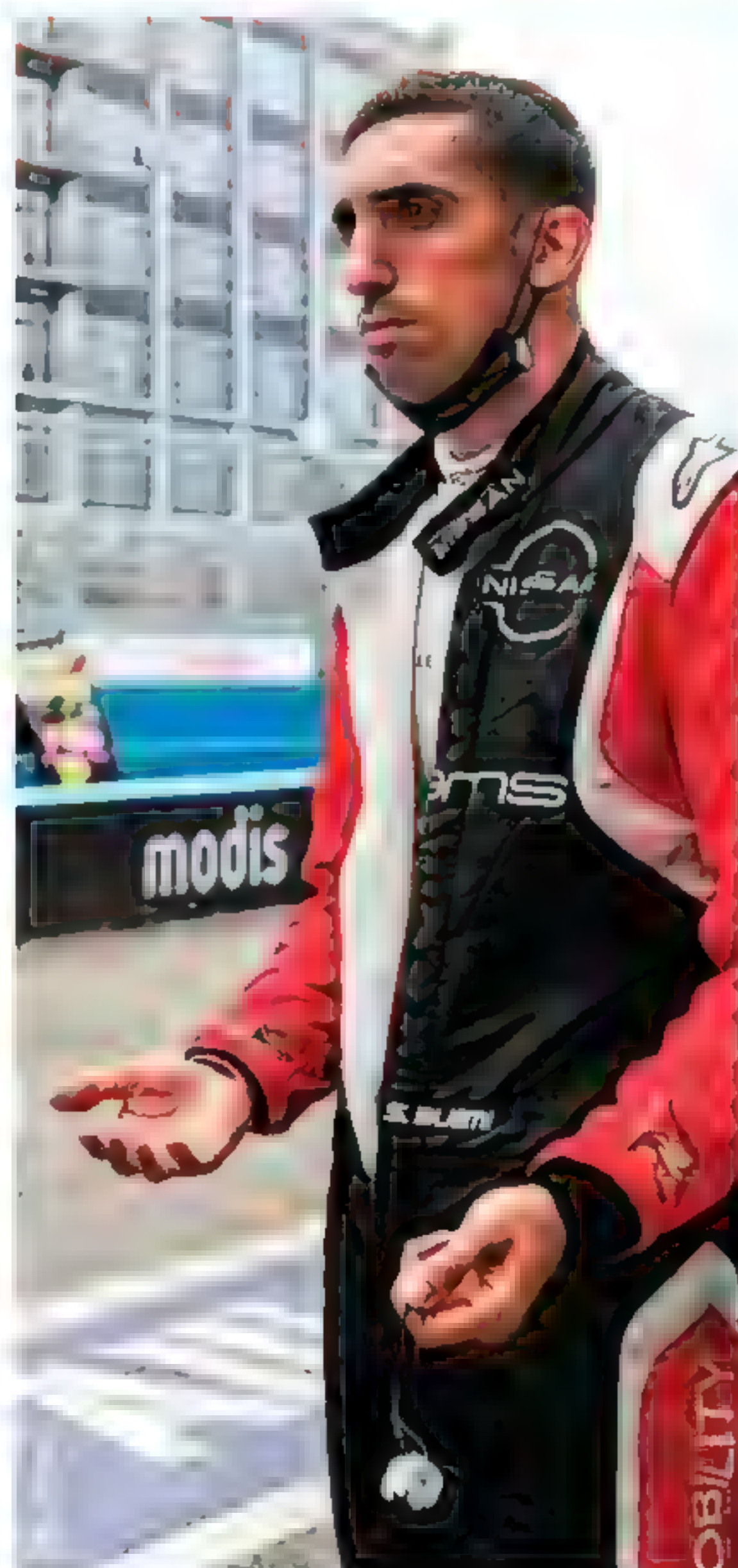
32

SEBASTIEN BUEMI

▼DOWN 16

2nd in World Endurance Championship;
21st in Formula E

If Sebastien Buemi had enjoyed the kind of season that had been the norm for him in Formula E, he would be much higher in this list. Yet despite a disastrous FE campaign with Nissan e.dams, his sportscar form keeps him in such an elevated position. The Swiss failed to record a podium in FE and finished outside the top four in the points for the first time, but he was the fastest Toyota driver across the WEC season. It would be wrong to call him the stand-out, because the best of the six were evenly matched. Yet Buemi was always up there on the averages, if not the quickest, not far from it.



ANALYSIS

Formula E: what went wrong for Buemi?

Sebastien Buemi struggles to explain what went wrong over the 2020-21 Formula E Championship on the way to 21st position in the points. He calls his campaign a "disaster", one that "went from bad to worse", and one in which team-mate Oliver Rowland "did the better job".

Momentum probably had something to do with it in a year when Nissan didn't have a truly competitive car. A clash with Porsche driver Andre Lotterer took him out of fourth in the first of the two Valencia races, and it was downhill from then on.

"The season never kind of clicked," he says. "We had the crash with Andre, eventually changed some parts for

Puebla because the car didn't feel right. I had the fastest lap in qualifying for the first race at New York, but messed up in Super Pole and ended up fifth. I finished fourth in race one in London and was disqualified. It just never came together, even though the season was probably better than the results made it look.

"Momentum is important in motor racing. But I can't say that I somehow started overdriving and made mistakes because of that. I try to tell myself not to do that and treat each race as a fresh start."

Buemi dismisses the suggestion that developing the new Toyota GR010 HYBRID and all the test miles that entailed had a negative effect on his FE season.

"I've seen that written, but I don't buy it," he says. "If anything I did less with Toyota this year: we only had six races in the WEC and we didn't do more testing than in previous years. Maybe that's people looking for an excuse on my behalf, but it's not correct.

"I'm clearly not happy with the way FE went, but sometimes there have been years in the WEC that have been really bad. This year I had a really good year in the WEC even if we didn't win the championship, but a terrible year for the first time in FE. I've just got to try to put it behind me and move on."



KALLE ROVANPERA

+NEW ENTRY

4th in World Rally Championship

Long-billed as rallying's next big thing, Kalle Rovanperä firmly outlined in 2021 why many feel the newest flying Finn is destined to become a World Rally champion in the near future. In only his second full-time season in the top tier with Toyota, the 21-year-old became the WRC's youngest-ever winner with a commanding display in Estonia. He backed this up with an equally impressive domination of the Acropolis on his first attempt at the famous Greek event, prompting Toyota team boss Jari Matti-Latvala to hail his young charge as a "complete" driver. Expectation is only likely to increase further as Toyota adjusts to life after Sebastien Ogier...



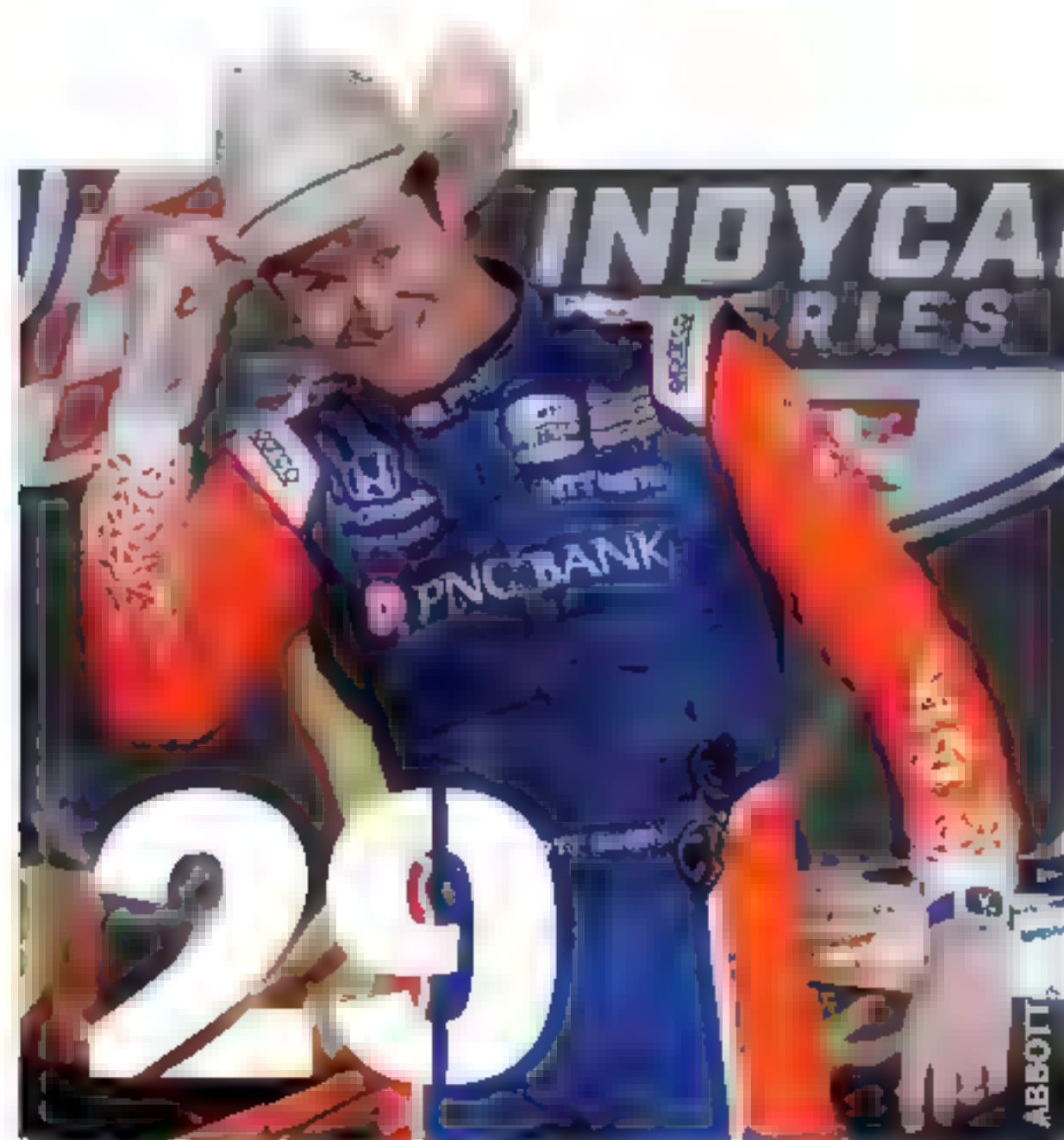
DANIEL RICCIARDO

▼DOWN 23

8th in Formula 1 World Championship

Daniel Ricciardo's start to life at McLaren was atrocious as he struggled to align his preference for late braking with what the MCL35M needed to be strong at corner entry. When Lando Norris had to be waved past and then disappeared at Imola, the initial gulf between them was revealed. But Ricciardo rallied, allying all the simulator work he and his engineers had completed with a summer-break trip to LA to reset and recharge. His confidence with the car improved considerably, and when McLaren had its chance at Monza he nailed it. There were later lows – such as tagging Valtteri Bottas in Mexico, which wasn't as bad as it looked – but he closed the intra-team gap.





SCOTT DIXON

▼DOWN 21

4th in IndyCar Series

Like his longtime adversary and fellow fortysomething Will Power, Scott Dixon found himself struggling at times, and his difficulties were sometimes highlighted by new team-mate Alex Palou's superlative season. Dixon long ago proved that on his best days he can make the art of winning an IndyCar race look simple, but only one of those days occurred in 2021 – the first Texas race – although he was cruelly unlucky to have a potential second Indy 500 victory whipped from his grasp so early in the race. There were just too many weekends where he couldn't quite match Palou. There are more wins in him, but is there a seventh championship?



TOMOKI NOJIRI

✚NEW ENTRY

1st in Super Formula; 2nd in Super GT

It may have taken until his eighth season in the series, but Honda man Tomoki Nojiri finally capitalised on the speed he had previously shown on a sporadic basis to become Super Formula's most dominant champion in a decade in 2021. Three wins in the first five races afforded the Mugen driver the luxury of winning the title with a round to spare. In Super GT, Nojiri was equally formidable in the ARTA NSX-GT he shared with Nirei Fukuzumi. His finest moment came at Motegi, when he applied the pressure on the Impul Nissan and took advantage when the GT-R ran out of fuel to score back-to-back wins.



MARTIN TRUEX JR

—RE-ENTRY

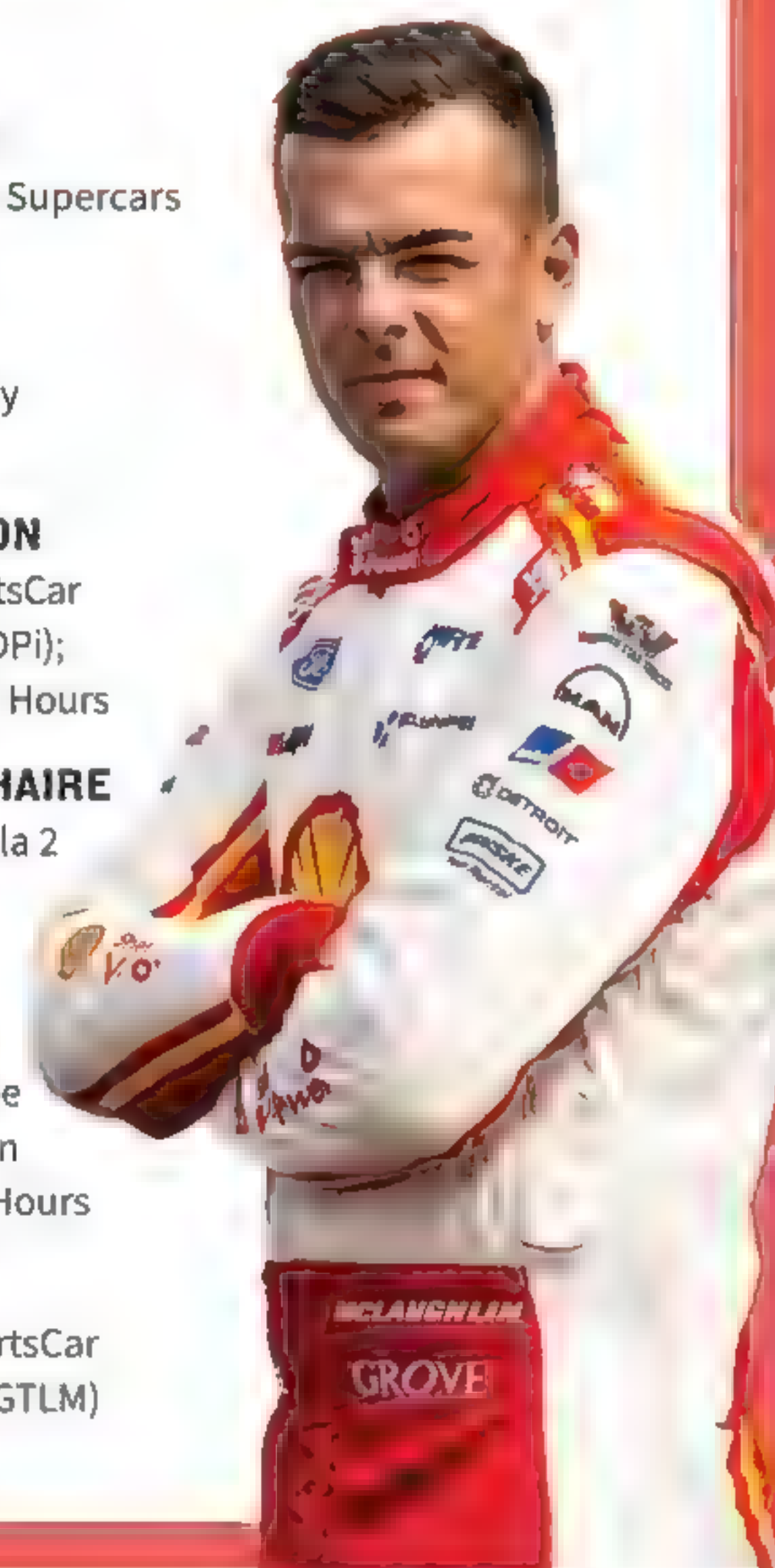
2nd in NASCAR Cup

While he has won only a single NASCAR Cup championship, Martin Truex Jr has become one of the most consistent title challengers of late. Behind four series wins in 2021, the Joe Gibbs Racing man again reached the Championship 4, the fourth time in the past five seasons he's been in position to win the crown. But for the third time, the 2017 champion finished runner-up. Truex led late in the title race before a caution sent all the lead-lap cars down pitroad for new tyres and Kyle Larson came out first. Truex grabbed second on the restart but couldn't quite close the gap to Larson by the finish.

TOP 50 DROP-OUTS FROM 2020

Drivers' 2020 Top 50 position and their 2021 results

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 10 RENE RAST
13th in Formula E | 27 YUKI TSUNODA
14th in F1 World Championship | 40 CAM WATERS
5th in Australian Supercars Championship |
| 13 SCOTT McLAUGHLIN
(pictured) 14th in IndyCar Series | 28 CHASE ELLIOTT
4th in NASCAR Cup | 41 OTT TANAK
5th in World Rally Championship |
| 14 KEVIN HARVICK
5th in NASCAR Cup | 31 CALLUM ILOTT
11th in GT World Challenge Europe Endurance; 3rd in Le Mans 24 Hours (GTE Am); three races in IndyCar | 42 DANE CAMERON
5th in IMSA SportsCar Championship (DPI); 3rd in Sebring 12 Hours |
| 17 MIKE CONWAY
1st in World Endurance Championship; 1st in Le Mans 24 Hours | 33 RYO HIRAKAWA
4th in Super Formula; 11th in Super GT | 46 THEO POURCHAIRE
5th in FIA Formula 2 |
| 21 NICO MULLER
10th in DTM; 20th in Formula E part-season; 4th in Spa 24 Hours | 35 JEAN-ERIC VERGNE
10th in Formula E | 48 RAFFAELE MARCIELLO
2nd in GT World Challenge Europe Endurance; 3rd in Nurburgring 24 Hours |
| 24 DENNY HAMLIN
3rd in NASCAR Cup | 37 DANIIL KVYAT
Alpine F1 reserve driver | 50 NICK TANDY
2nd in IMSA SportsCar Championship (GTL) |
| 25 MICK SCHUMACHER
19th in F1 World Championship | 38 NICK CASSIDY
15th in Formula E | |
| 26 STOFFEL VANDOORNE
9th in Formula E; 2nd in World Endurance Championship (LMP2) | 39 KIMI RAIKKONEN
16th in F1 World Championship | |



TOP 50 RE-ENTRIES

- 5 ALEX PALOU**
41st in 2019
- 22 KEVIN ESTRE**
26th in 2019
- 24 FERNANDO ALONSO**
19th in 2019; 2nd in 2018; 3rd in 2017
- 26 KAMUI KOBAYASHI**
30th in 2017;
28th in 2012;
24th in 2010
- 27 MARTIN TRUEX JR**
32nd in 2019;
41st in 2018;
8th in 2017
- 33 ESTEBAN OCON**
19th in 2018;
28th in 2014
- 37 FELIPE NASR**
32nd in 2011
- 38 EDOARDO MORTARA**
33rd in 2016;
16th in 2010
- 39 SEBASTIAN VETTEL**
24th in 2019; 8th in 2018;
4th in 2017
- 44 ROBIN FRIJNS**
30th in 2016; 9th in 2012
- 48 DRIES VANTHOOR**
46th in 2018



KAMUI KOBAYASHI

—RE-ENTRY

**1st in World Endurance Championship;
1st in Le Mans 24 Hours**

Kamui Kobayashi shaded it as the best driver in the title-winning Toyota WEC line-up, though the margins were fine. There wasn't a lot between him and co-champions Mike Conway and Jose Maria Lopez, or between the Japanese and Sebastien Buemi in the sister car. The Swiss was the quicker driver on average across the six races, but falls behind here as a result of a poor year in Formula E, as well as Kobayashi's qualifying performances. His three poles were crucial. The title winners outsourced their team-mates 4-1 in qualifying. Had it been the other way around, the championship outcome would have been different.



SERGIO PEREZ

▼DOWN 14

4th in Formula 1 World Championship

There were races where he backed up Max Verstappen brilliantly – Baku, Paul Ricard – but others where he was notably absent from the lead fight, which is where Red Bull hired him to be. Spain was a good example: he qualified poorly, then couldn't pass slower cars. His mid-season dip was down to altering his set-up away from Verstappen's to make hustling the RB16B easier – but this cost lap time so he switched back and improved by getting used to the tricky machine, key to his late podium streak. The Baku win was his highlight, which was remarkable considering a hydraulic problem meant he was on the verge of late retirement.



Kobayashi's qualifying pace resulted in three crucial pole positions.



FERNANDO ALONSO

—RE-ENTRY

10th in Formula 1 World Championship

Struggled for qualifying pace early on, but from Baku onwards had the edge on team-mate Esteban Ocon. That race also showcased his starting strength, as he gained well at the restart. Was a sprint race star at Silverstone and showed tyre management prowess, particularly in later races such as Russia (where staying out too late in the rain scuppered a podium chance) and Qatar, where he returned to the podium. His cutting soundbites returned to F1, as did his brilliant wheel-to-wheel antics, which boost his ranking. Battle with Russell in Austria was superb, and his incredible defence against Hamilton in Hungary saved his Alpine team-mate's victory.



OSCAR PIASTRI

+NEW ENTRY

1st in FIA Formula 2 Championship

On his move up into F2 after successive titles in Formula Renault and F3, big things were expected of Oscar Piastri, but he surely exceeded expectations with his supreme 2021 campaign. After failing to score a single pole position in F3, he became the qualifying king in F2, and his ever-impressive racecraft was on display too. Apart from a wobbly start in Bahrain, where he finished 19th following a collision, Piastri took a podium in every feature race on his march to the crown, and amassed six wins in total. Goes into 2022 as the Alpine F1 reserve driver and will surely be in the running for a 2023 race seat.



KEVIN ESTRE

—RE-ENTRY

2nd in World Endurance Championship (GTE Pro); 1st in Nurburgring 24 Hours

The Frenchman was in superlative form for Porsche as he and new team-mate Neel Jani narrowly – and controversially – missed out on the GTE Pro WEC crown. They won half the races and might have won two more to put the title out of Ferrari's reach. Estre was the senior partner in the #92 car; prototype stalwart Jani was clever enough to cede that role to his team-mate. Estre was given the car for qualifying in all six races and delivered pole in five. Yet Estre was much more than a one-lap wonder in 2021. His double-stint to turn the tide mid-race in the Bahrain curtain-closer was sublime.

ENGINEER'S VIEW

Working hard at finding speed

Adam Hardy, race engineer #92 Porsche 911 RSR, on Estre the qualifier

"When Kevin and Michael [Christensen] came together at Porsche in the WEC back in 2017, Michael was the guy who could nail that quick lap in qualifying. He was generally the quicker of the two in the days when both drivers had to set a lap time under the old qualifying system.

"Kevin learned a lot from Michael over time. One thing you have to say about Kevin is that he's a hard worker: he's always delving deep into the data as he strives to get better. He has understood that he needs to hold a little back rather than going all out and losing a couple of tenths with a little mistake.

"Before he had to maybe drive at 90% to avoid mistakes, but now you could say he is at 99%. There's been an evolution over time in his performance.

"There is a very clear peak on the current

Michelines, so you've got to nail it on lap one. Kevin has become very good at getting the most out of the tyres on that first flier.

"We are very aggressive on #92 with our qualifying set-up to make sure the car has front-end grip. Michael led development of that set-up and Kevin has learned how to drive it. If you want to get the most out of the tyres, you need an oversteery car and there aren't many drivers who can handle the RSR in the way Kevin can with that set-up. You can see some pretty wild things on his data – lots of oversteer and massive steering inputs.

"Kevin is clearly a driver at the top of his game right now. There's no question that he is massively talented and can do it on one lap, but it has taken a lot of hard work from him and an evolution of how we approach qualifying to get to the point where we could do what we did in 2021. Michael definitely helped in that, and Kevin would be the first to admit it."



VALTTERI BOTTAS

▼ **DOWN 9**

3rd in Formula 1 World Championship

Pre the announcement that he'd be replaced by George Russell at Mercedes, he had several slow starts, costly qualifying gaps to Lewis Hamilton, was almost embarrassingly off the pace in the Imola race and in Baku overall, and triggered the first big crash in Hungary. Afterwards he was excellent, relaxed by knowing he had a lengthy (and likely lucrative) Alfa Romeo deal for 2022. That resulted in Monza pace, podium and unrecognised pole, his commanding Turkey wet win and Interlagos sprint triumph. Was overall too inconsistent, but did also have the share of Mercedes' pit and engine misfortune. Lost an excellent Monaco result, where Hamilton struggled more to find tyre temperature for a change, to a 43-hour pitstop nightmare.



ALESSANDRO PIER GUIDI

✚ **NEW ENTRY**

1st in World Endurance Championship (GTE Pro); 1st in Spa 24 Hours; 1st in GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup

Did Alessandro Pier Guidi raise his game to an even higher level in 2021 on the way to two major GT titles? It seemed that way at times, and not just when he came from behind to take victory at the Spa 24 Hours. The Italian was the fastest Ferrari driver in GTE Pro in the WEC. Pier Guidi outpaced co-champion James Calado four times out of six on the way to a title won in controversial circumstances in Bahrain. Let's hope that his season is remembered for another last-gasp triumph: his around-the-outside manoeuvre at Blanchimont to claim victory at Spa, the cornerstone of his GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup title, was breathtaking.



How van Gisbergen reached another level

To put it bluntly, Shane van Gisbergen made the Supercars field look average this year. It's not, of course. It's packed with professional drivers, some among the best in the world outside of Formula 1. But the 32-year-old was quite clearly on another level in 2021 as he added a second title to his first in 2016.

Prompted by being asked if he missed having fierce rival Scott McLaughlin in Supercars, van Gisbergen volunteered some insight into his form relative to the rest of the field after wrapping up the Supercars title a round early. He explained that he, Jamie Whincup and McLaughlin had pushed each other to new heights during the Triple Eight/Dick Johnson Racing battle over the past four or five seasons, beyond even bona fide stars such as Chaz Mostert and Cam Waters.

Then McLaughlin left for IndyCar and Whincup, perhaps, took his eye off the ball as his transition from driver to T8 team boss neared. And van Gisbergen was left way out front, all on his own.

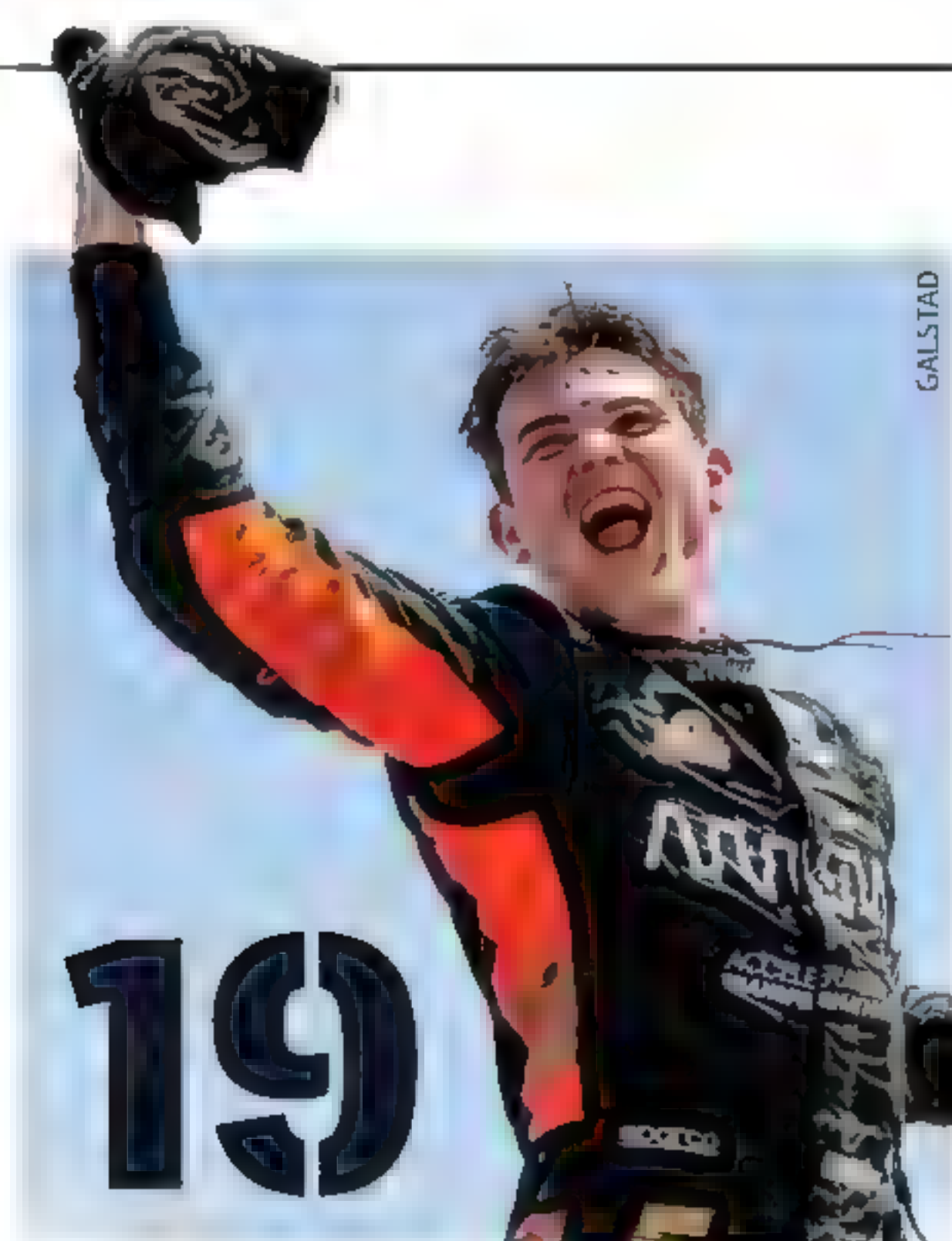
"I would have loved to have raced [McLaughlin this year]," said van Gisbergen. "There's been three guys the last few years and our level has just gone crazy. I had to lift to Scotty, had to lift to Jamie, and we've all pushed each other.

"One of them is gone and the other has got, probably, a lot of outside factors that influence him. But I've got to keep focused, stay above that level and not drop to everyone else.

"It's been awesome, this championship the last few years, trying to perform to your peak and keep learning. And I think this year I kept getting better. I've got to keep improving."

But don't assume that van Gisbergen will have it even easier in 2022 when Whincup becomes his boss rather than his team-mate. Between Anton De Pasquale's Sydney swagger in November (seven poles and five wins from 10 races) and Mostert's superb Bathurst 1000 win, there are signs that others are looking to rise to the Kiwi's challenge.





PATO O'WARD

▲UP 15
3rd in IndyCar Series

As in 2020, Pato O'Ward was Arrow McLaren SP's cutting edge this year, and he moved on from being a podium gatherer to become a winner, conquering Texas Motor Speedway and Detroit. He also maintained his record of making few mistakes, which is why he went into the finale with a shot at the title. But O'Ward also discovered that AMSP's set-ups that rapidly turn on his tyres were a double-edged sword, so there were weekends where he was anonymous through tyre degradation or an overly twitchy car hurting his qualifying pace. Still, most believe AMSP will find a solution and that O'Ward will remain at the forefront of the series.



JOSEF NEWGARDEN

▼DOWN 12
2nd in IndyCar Series

Penske had a torrid run in the first half of the season – sometimes through luck, sometimes through lacking that last scintilla of pace – and so it took until the 10th round for The Captain's team to enter Victory Lane. When it did so at Mid-Ohio, it was Josef Newgarden who delivered with a dominant run, the round after a similar effort at Road America that was lost to an electrical gremlin. Victory at Gateway left him very much in title contention, but by then the two-time champion had temporarily lost his way in street/road-course qualifying trim. Pole for the finale was encouraging... but too late to help him take a third title.



ANTONIO FELIX DA COSTA

▼DOWN 14
8th in Formula E; 3rd in WEC (LMP2)

Despite falling to eighth in the Formula E standings, it was a title defence almost without mistake from Antonio Felix da Costa. He was the innocent party in collisions and blameless when car components failed. But his fall from third in 2020 to 17th in this list reflects the decline in Formula E's stature after a clumsy term, and an absence of the one-lap heroics he used to overcome the group qualifying format to claim three poles last year. The Portuguese did, however, shine brightly in the WEC, with *that* Le Mans qualifying lap for LMP2 pole (by half a second) impressing most of all.



SHANE VAN GISBERGEN

▲UP 31
1st in Australian Supercars Championship

Shane van Gisbergen's 2021 season was nothing short of remarkable. He set the scene with a thrilling cameo at January's New Zealand Grand Prix, which he won (comfortably) despite being forced to start from the pitlane after his fire extinguisher went off. In Supercars even a broken collarbone and three broken ribs sustained while mountain biking couldn't stop him. Three weeks after undergoing surgery he won at Sandown from 17th, part of his six-race winning streak to open the season. By winning 14 races in total, the title was his with a round to spare. He also became only the second Bathurst Triple Crown winner by taking the 6 Hour, and was a race winner in GT World Challenge Australia too.



JAKE DENNIS

3rd in Formula E

Don't believe anyone who says they predicted Jake Dennis to finish third in his rookie Formula E campaign. He smashed expectations after becoming the surprise winner of a shootout to land the second seat at BMW Andretti. A point-less debut outing in Saudi Arabia might have set the tone, but he controlled a peloton-style train to perfection at Valencia to land his first win. His run in Mexico was sound and in London he took to the top step again to cap a superb display. This all came as he trounced his hot-shot team-mate Maximilian Guenther and squeezed remarkable performance out of a mid-tier powertrain.



Russell's standout performance in qualifying at Spa secured his first F1 podium



COLTON HERTA

▲ UP 8
5th in IndyCar Series

The only driver besides Alex Palou to score three IndyCar wins in 2021, Colton Herta more firmly established himself as de facto lead driver at Andretti Autosport. The 21-year-old American was outrageously quick at Nashville, even if the frustration of being set back by a preponderance of caution flags tripped his self-control meter just long enough to send him into the wall. But when you consider that was his only mistake of consequence this season, that he was robbed of a potential win at Gateway, a podium at Mid-Ohio, and a top-five in Texas, it's clear Herta has the potential to be champion – and many times over, if he resists the allure of Formula 1...



ELFYN EVANS

▲ UP 16
2nd in World Rally Championship

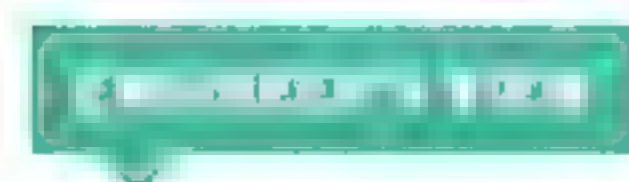
Elfyn Evans proved that his World Rally Championship title tilt last year was no fluke by taking Sebastien Ogier down to the wire for a second straight year – and over five more events. The Welshman reached new heights in 2021, admitting he's never driven better after scoring wins in Portugal and Finland. The latter was arguably the best of his career to date, with Evans blitzing the opposition in the fast Finnish forests to become only the second British driver to win the event. With his gutsy drive to second in Spain, Evans trimmed Ogier's points lead and took the title to a Monza showdown, pushing his Toyota team-mate all the way.



GEORGE RUSSELL

▲ UP 3
15th in Formula 1 World Championship

His remonstrance with Valtteri Bottas after their Imola crash was his low point, but George Russell bounced back brilliantly, quickly extending a Q1 escape run – which included Q3 berths at the Austrian GP and at Silverstone – that stretched to Hungary at the end of July. His sensational Spa qualifying was the highlight as it secured his first F1 podium in the washout. Races were always harder for Williams since the car's long-run pace was much slower, but Russell made excellent progress with tyre management, displayed best in France. He picked up emotional points in Hungary, plus Italy and Russia (where he also starred in the wet/dry Q3 to qualify third) too.



How Russell compares to Button and Hamilton

Williams head of vehicle performance Dave Robson explains how George Russell's driving style compares to those of Jenson Button and Lewis Hamilton – Britain's two most recent world champions. Robson worked at McLaren before joining Williams, and race-engineered Button between 2010 and 2014.

"I think Jenson and Lewis were quite different and George is his own in terms of their driving style. George is somewhere in between the two of them but I think to some extent that is about dealing with the tyres and they have changed – so I don't know what Lewis's style is these days. But the key thing is George is adaptable and he is quite instinctive and I think he will go on to improve. He's got the talent that he needs. He has had a rough time with us, and some good times, and I think he will have learned quite a lot from that.

"But in terms of his style and his attitude he is right up there with those two guys. His work ethic and the way

he brings the team together, and his ability and confidence to make decisions – they are all the real key things or the big differentiators. He has got the talent to drive the car. There are enough people out there who have the talent that he has, but he also has all that he needs to be able to do the extra bit to really get the most out of the team in the crucial and pressure moments to make the right decisions.

"What he's still got to learn is just in terms of the ways the weekends pan out – obviously they're quite different for Mercedes. Saturday particularly, but the whole race dynamic is different when you're up at the sharp end.

"In terms of our 2021 championship, what happened in Spa was obviously good for us in terms of the points, but it would have been good for George to have a dry race on Sunday from the front row and have actually experienced what that was like. We would have had a worse result, I'm sure, but that probably would have been a good bit of learning for him."



MITCH EVANS

▲ UP 9 4th in Formula E

Mitch Evans topped our standalone Formula E rankings but falls behind Nyck de Vries here since there's no tandem sportscar campaign to bolster his rating. But the Kiwi still satisfied four key criteria. One, he delivered a title challenge and his ultimate undoing, stalling in Berlin, was not his fault when the car tripped. Two, he did so in a Jaguar that was second-best to Mercedes. Three, mistakes were rare – albeit he committed a costly one when he clonked the wall in New York to lose second place. Fourth, and most importantly, he bested an experienced and highly rated team-mate in Sam Bird, even if Evans failed to win while the Brit twice tasted victory.



PIERRE GASLY

▼ DOWN 6

9th in Formula 1 World Championship

Even minus a victory compared to last year, Pierre Gasly's 2021 was better than 2020. He nailed his target of being more consistent with the AlphaTauri, where he found a great compromise on set-up of being able to push the car hard at corner entry and still get the front axle to stick at the apex, keeping speed high. His Baku podium was the glittering highlight this year – he was grappling with an engine problem – but his drives at Zandvoort and in Mexico, where he drove away from the Ferraris, surpass it. He was a near-constant presence in Q3, where he regularly starred. Occasionally struggled for pace in the pack if not on an optimum strategy.



NYCK DE VRIES

▲ UP 23

1st in Formula E;
5th in European Le Mans Series (part-time)

While everyone else speculated about a possible Formula 1 future for Nyck de Vries and Mercedes quitting Formula E, the Dutchman remained undistracted. He was imperious when the season started in Saudi Arabia and, amid the folly at Valencia, he only artificially gained one place to win again. There was a mistake in Monaco qualifying, when he knocked the car out of full-power mode, but on the other occasions when one-lap pace was lacking it was due to his team pursuing the wrong development path. Inconsistency was the perverse key to success in Formula E in 2021, and de Vries converted his chances by ensuring he was almost unbeatable on the good days to overcome the bad.



KYLE LARSON

▲ DOWN 11 1st in NASCAR Cup

Kyle Larson wasn't racing a year ago due to a suspension, but capped a magical comeback season with his 10th win of the year in the Phoenix finale that clinched his first NASCAR Cup championship. The 29-year-old was suspended from NASCAR and fired by Chip Ganassi Racing last March for using a racial slur during a public iRacing event. He sat out the remainder of the 2020 season, with a return to NASCAR never a certainty. After fulfilling the requirements to lift his suspension, Hendrick Motorsports added Larson to its four-driver Cup team for 2021 and he capitalised on the opportunity to produce the most dominant Cup season since 2007.

The extracurricular activities that underline Larson's star credentials

Kyle Larson not only completed a stunning NASCAR comeback by winning his first Cup Series title in 2021, but he also capped an extraordinary season of racing success across multiple motorsport disciplines in the United States.

In addition to the career-best 10 points-paying wins (plus victory in the All-Star race) that Larson amassed in Cup across several types of tracks in his first season at Hendrick Motorsports, he engaged in extracurricular racing events throughout the year thanks to team owner Rick Hendrick relenting on a previous policy of having his Cup Series drivers focus solely on that discipline.

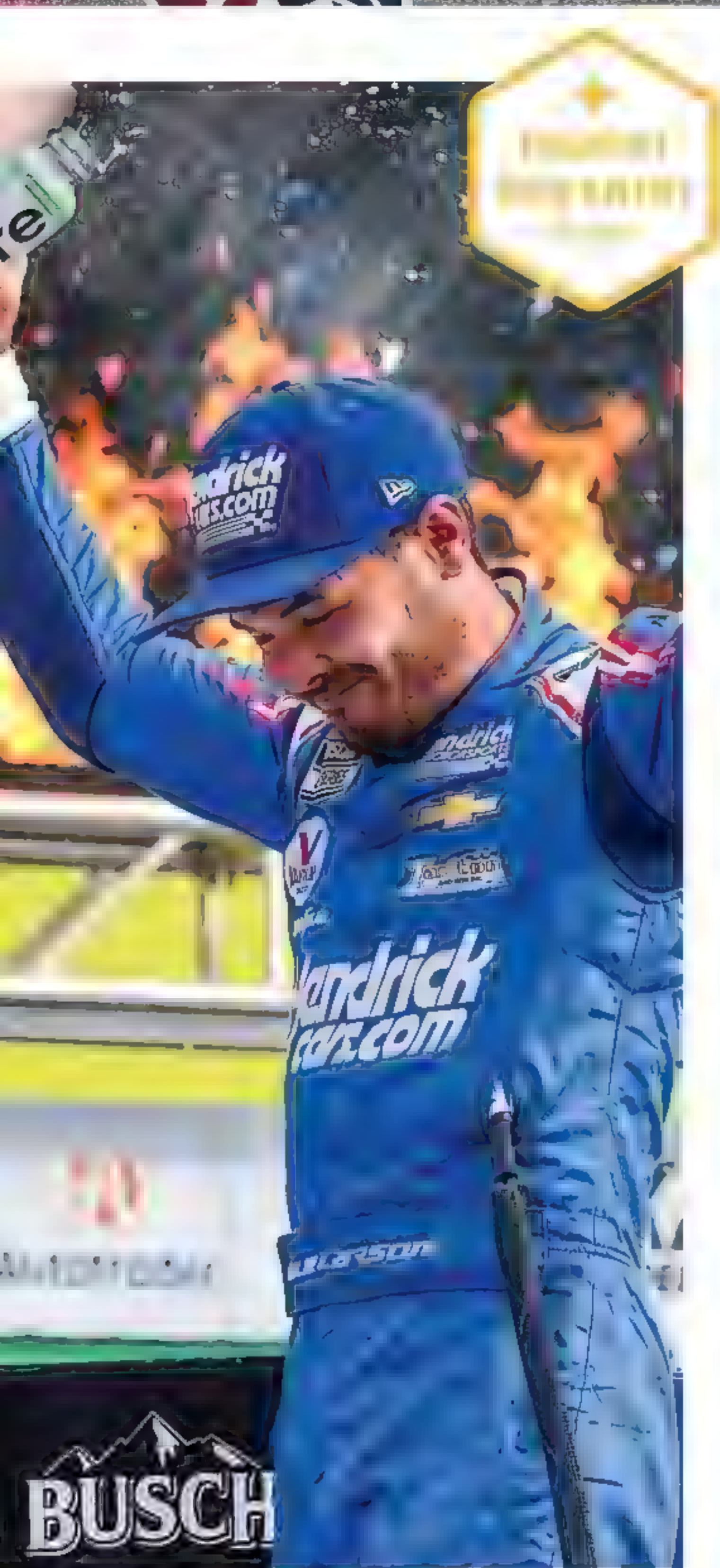
"I never thought racing for Hendrick Motorsports that I would get to race a single dirt race in a year, let alone as many as I have this year," said Larson, who twice managed to win three Cup races in succession, and

tied Tony Stewart's 2011 record of winning five playoff races.

Larson won the 2021 edition of the Chili Bowl Nationals, the most prestigious midget car race in the US; won the Knoxville Nationals and Kings Royal races – two elite sprint car events; and also claimed victory in the premier Prairie Dirt Classic Late Model event. In all, he collected 29 wins in 87 racing starts.

"I'm just a very lucky guy who gets to race in the best race cars of all the series that I get to run in," Larson says. "I'm in the best seat in the Cup Series. I'm in the best seat in a sprint car. I'm in the best seat in a late model. I'm in the best seat in a midget, whether it be with Chad Boat or my old car."

He even threw his hat into the ring for a drive in Formula 1's post-season Abu Dhabi rookie test. Now that would be something...

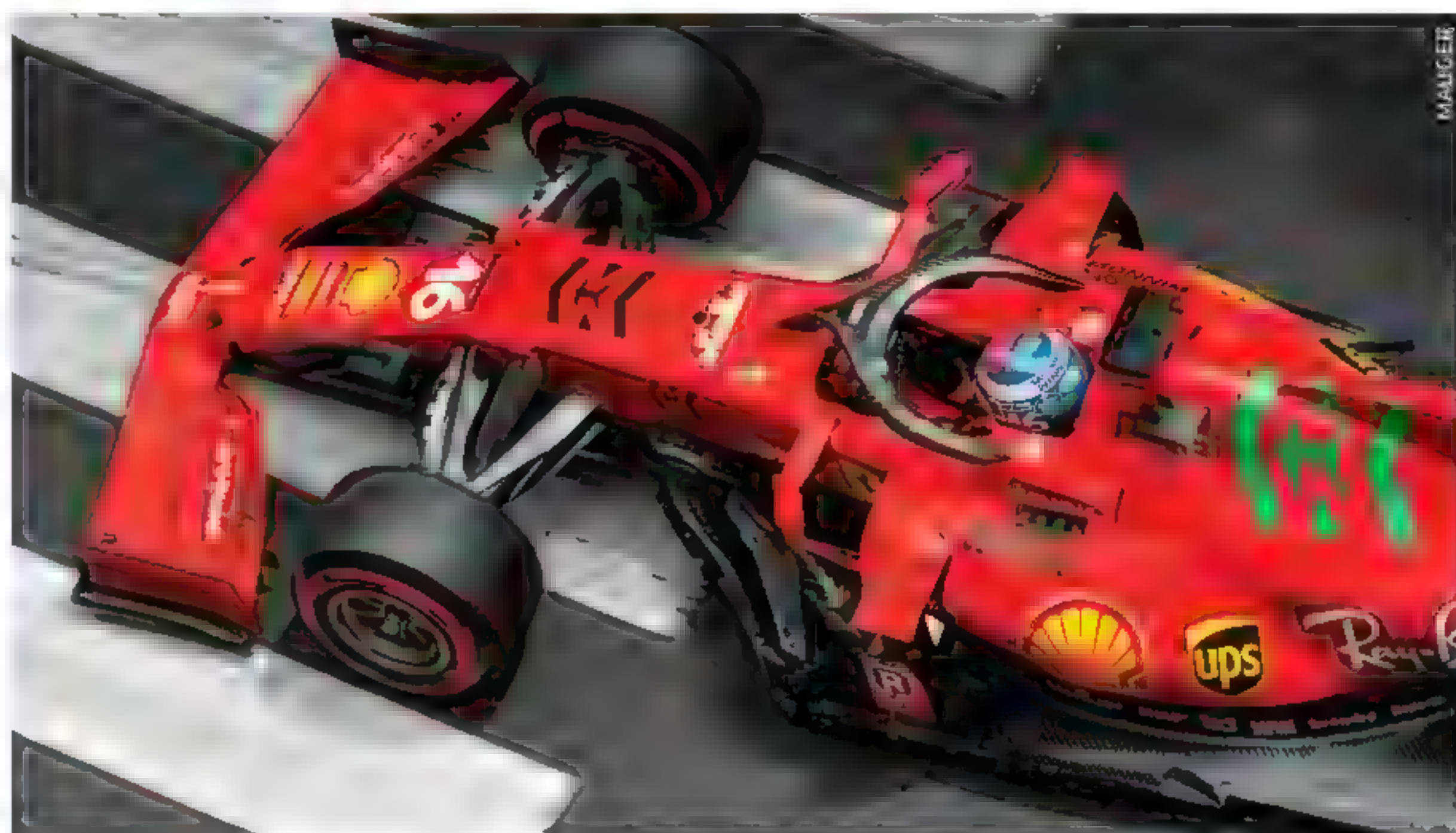


CARLOS SAINZ JR

▲ UP 11

5th in Formula 1 World Championship

A fine first year in red, where he managed the switch to a new team better than any of the other four drivers who made new homes in 2021. He was shaded in qualifying by Charles Leclerc – no shame in that – but his performances against the clock got better as the year went on. Of the two, he also at times displayed superior tyre management, something Ferrari really struggled with on occasions. Front-row start and leading in Russia was the highlight, but also bagged four podium results and scored a sprint race medal in Brazil, which came after he spotted falling grid temperatures and so opted for soft tyres, which helped him beat a Red Bull.



CHARLES LECLERC

▼ DOWN 1

7th in Formula 1 World Championship

Charles Leclerc came close to ending Ferrari's victory drought on three occasions and beat Carlos Sainz Jr in the qualifying head-to-head come the year's end. His qualifying speed was evident from the off with two early poles, and he regularly disrupted things for the top two teams in races. Ferrari still feels he needs to up his game on technical feedback and cut out the occasional qualifying error such as that Monaco Q3 crash. Felt Austin was a faultless weekend, but Silverstone and the way he fended off Hamilton for so long with an ailing engine was just remarkable. Don't forget the no-stop win attempt in Turkey either.



ALEX PALOU

—RE-ENTRY
1st in IndyCar Series

In 2021, Alex Palou effectively became the author of 'How to win an IndyCar championship in the current era'. Despite it being only his second season in the series, he was without question the most complete driver of the year, only once truly overreaching himself – that crash during qualifying for the Indianapolis 500. He looked underwhelming at St Petersburg, but his only other such days – in terms of his own performance – came in Texas Motor Speedway's double-header, where he was very obviously choosing caution over valour in his first ever oval races for Chip Ganassi Racing. The boss, like most of his peers, prefers drivers who bring their cars home rather than take fifty-fifty risks.

That appeared to boost his confidence on ovals, so he comfortably went toe to toe with Helio Castroneves on Memorial Day Weekend, and didn't hurl his car at the wall in frustration as he pursued the finest Indy 500 performer of this millennium, thus earning second place. In qualifying at Gateway, none of the Ganassi cars were *au point* and Palou was also suffering one of three early-engine-change grid penalties, so was consigned to 21st in the starting line-up. Yet after 64 laps he was into the top 10 and perhaps heading for a podium, before he was taken out by Rinus VeeKay.

If Palou's oval progress was impressive,

so too was his determination to never let setbacks cause him to make an irrational error. If those grid penalties and the engine failure at Indy road course in August were frustrating, the re-order by IndyCar Race Control after the Turn 1 fracas at Portland was rather more than that. It must have felt like he was being punished for taking a route that deliberately avoided an accident. Yet he turned in probably his finest drive of the year to clock his third win of the season; he had channeled his outrage into a flawless performance. Second and fourth places in the remaining two races were enough to seal the championship. To have scored eight top-three finishes from 16 races in a field as stacked as IndyCar's, Palou was as close to perfection as could be reasonably expected.



SEBASTIEN OGIER

▲UP 5
1st in World Rally Championship

Sebastien Ogier brought the curtain down on his full-time World Rally Championship career in style by winning an eighth world title. His latest championship, following previous successes in 2013-2018 and 2020, was perhaps not his most convincing. But the manner in which he clinched it, while handling the added pressure of knowing it was his last chance, was mightily impressive.

Title number eight seemed inevitable after he won four of the first six rallies, including a record eighth Monte Carlo Rally success. That victory was one of the Frenchman's best, recovering from a flat tyre to romp home 32.6s clear of Toyota team-mate Elfyn Evans.

Thereafter, as in 2020, Ogier faced a strong challenge from Evans, and the Welshman was an ever-present threat on Croatia's asphalt. Ogier had endured a tough rally, including a traffic accident on a road section, but proved his mettle under pressure to snatch victory from Evans on the final powerstage by 0.6s – the third-closest winning margin in WRC history.

At times, when unable to match the speed of the Hyundais, Ogier's ever-reliable Toyota Yaris helped guide him to victories, such as in the attritional Sardinia and on the WRC's return to Kenya for the Safari Rally when his rivals faltered.

The second half of the season was poor by his high standards – he scored only one podium in





How Ogier staked a claim to be WRC's greatest of all time

Sebastien Ogier has earned plenty of plaudits during a period of WRC dominance that has now yielded eight world titles, but it's praise from peers he cherishes the most.

In the eyes of many, he should be considered rallying's greatest of all-time with his record of winning titles with Volkswagen (2013-16), M-Sport Ford (2017-18) and Toyota (2020-21) compared to that of Sebastien Loeb, who won each of his nine titles with Citroen.

Ogier will be back to contest selected rallies next year, alongside a planned move into endurance racing, but the sight of him and co-driver Julien Ingrassia fighting for world titles has been consigned to history.

The Ogier versus Loeb debate

as to who is better will forever rattle on, but those who have watched his career insist Ogier is one of rallying's greatest.

Reflecting on his compatriot's career, Loeb says he admires Ogier's consistency and Fangio-like ability to ensure he has the best equipment possible.

"What makes him consistent is, I think, he is also the best in

the fact that he believes he is not leaving the rallies without points," says Loeb.

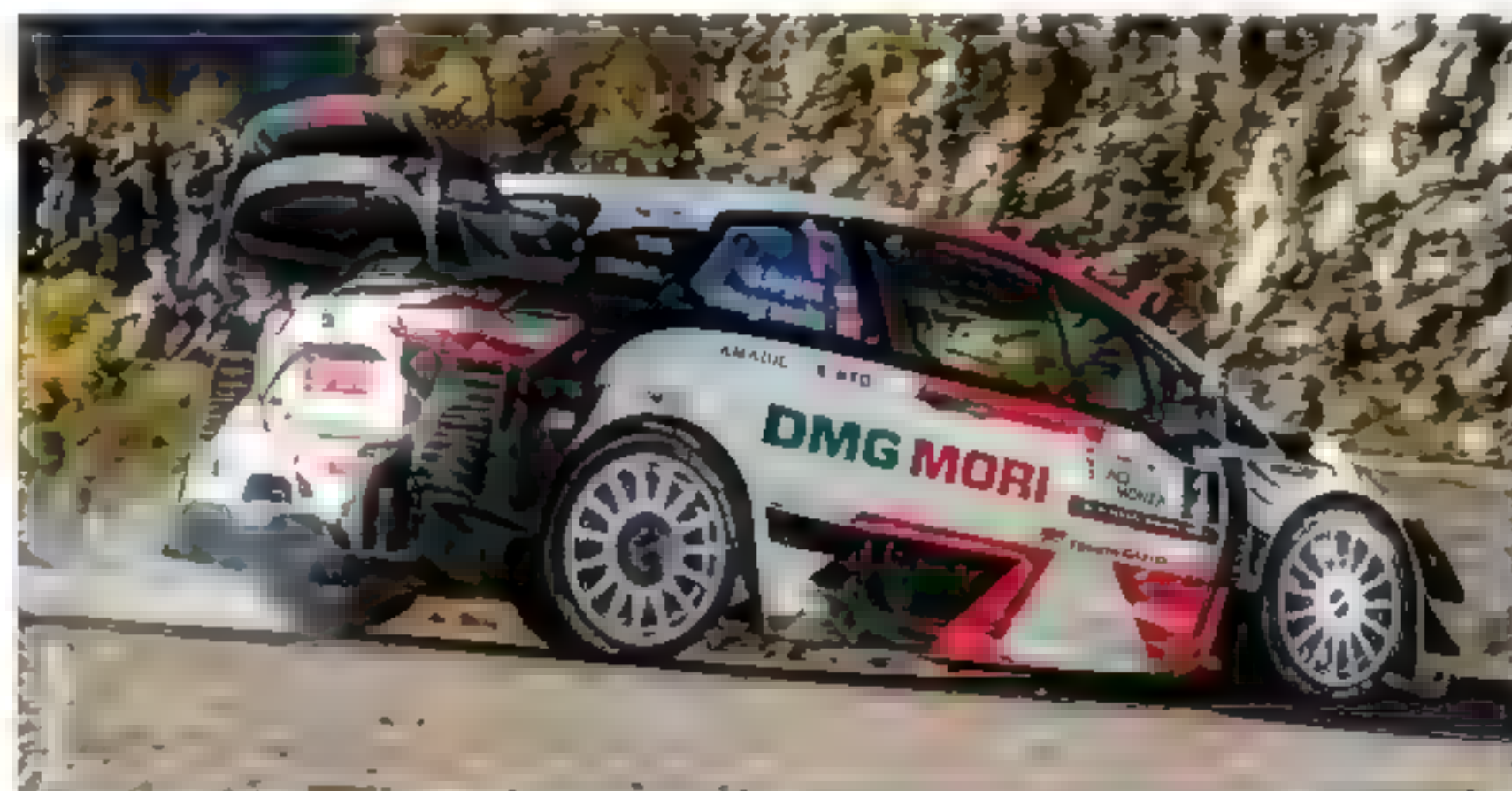
Petter Solberg, the 2003 WRC champion, considers Ogier the "total package", citing his motivation and the ability to extract winning potential from different cars to support his case.

Those who have worked closely with Ogier are also

convinced. Having driven alongside him at VW and now managed him as Toyota's team boss, Jari-Matti Latvala believes the 37-year-old "is the hardest head-to-head fighter we have ever seen in the rally world".

"He gets this spark when he is under pressure and, when he is fighting, he seems to get more energy for these moments," Latvala says.

Meanwhile, M-Sport team principal Richard Millener reserves the highest of praise for his former driver. "For me he is the best driver to have ever driven in the WRC," says Millener. "When you look at the fights he has had to win his championships, I think they have been some of the most difficult in the history of the WRC."



the next five rallies as he engaged preservation mode. A hallmark of Ogier's secret to success was there for all to see, however, as he kept scoring points, knowing when to push and concede while making few errors. Arguably the only on-stage error of his season was a crash into a snowbank

in February's Arctic Rally Finland, costing him a chance of decent points. Even so, he salvaged a point from the powerstage.

Ogier's advantage was 44 points with three rallies to go, but Evans's late form kept the title race alive to the Monza finale, where Ogier had

a 17-point lead to defend. He didn't need to win the rally to secure the title but, after a titanic scrap where the lead changed hands six times between the title protagonists, it was Ogier and retiring co-driver Julien Ingrassia who emerged on top. It was a fitting way to sign off.



LANDO NORRIS

▲UP 16

6th in Formula 1 World Championship

Points, podiums, performances – they’ve all totalled higher for Lando Norris in his third season in Formula 1. The first two are easily quantifiable – four rostrum visits, with 160 points resulting in sixth place in the drivers’ standings. But his regular race delivery this year, particularly in the first half of the season, was seriously impressive. For a long time, he was in a two-horse race to top this list.

Norris acknowledges that Carlos Sainz Jr departing to Ferrari and Daniel Ricciardo coming aboard meant he had an increased role at McLaren, where he was expected to voice his

opinions more and lead the team further. But with Ricciardo struggling so much in adapting to the MCL35M, the 22-year-old naturally became its lead driver, even if he didn’t get its headline-grabbing win. But Norris also dutifully played the team game at Monza, urging McLaren to get Ricciardo to up his pace after the safety car and his bold pass on Charles Leclerc, then settling in to preserve its 1-2 from the chasers, with the consequences of the Max Verstappen/Lewis Hamilton shunt in his mind.

Sochi was his highlight, as he scored a first F1 pole in the challenging wet-dry conditions. Falling back at the start isn’t uncommon with Sochi’s long first stretch, but he overcame Sainz and then might well have defied Hamilton without the rain arriving. He knows he needs to deliver feedback in such a scenario more calmly

and improve when the McLaren goes to a track that suits it less. Corner-entry instability turning to understeer has been a challenge at times for Norris, who also needs to be more adaptable when it comes to adjusting to new circuits.

His biggest mistake was moving across on Sainz at the start in Brazil, during a run where his results tailed off a touch and Ricciardo finally reached his level, although he points out that the track runoff he was occupying was dropping away more steeply than it looked. But he nailed all of McLaren’s early-season chances with aplomb – his drive in the wet at Imola, a day after he’d shown speed to take a shock pole only to run fractionally too wide during his final Q3 run, was superb. But his Red Bull and Mercedes-bothering performances in Austria, particularly the second race, were even better.



MAX VERSTAPPEN

—NO CHANGE

1st in F1 World Championship

There's one reason why Max Verstappen ended up second on this list and not first. And it's not down to his speed, his talent or his 10 victories not stacking up against the rest. It's the way he drove – too aggressively, too often – in many of his wheel-to-wheel fights with Lewis Hamilton.

Verstappen was, in many ways, *the* driver of the season. With Red Bull finally back in a title fight, he led the line as the contender it had long been suggested he would be. His high-pressure victory at Zandvoort in front of his home supporters was sublime. His wins in Monaco and Austria were utterly dominant, plus he handed Mercedes a stunning defeat at its former stronghold of Paul Ricard, at one point before the summer looking like he might run away with the title. His double-pass on the Mercedes pair in Mexico was the move of the season.

Verstappen remained the only driver who could really handle the tricky RB16B package, where his immense adaptability meant he was better equipped to cope with rear-end instability – which was much improved compared to 2020 – and the evolving challenge with the tyres. Verstappen just did, while team-mate Sergio Perez was constantly working up to the car's level. Uncomfortable was the only way to be fast in the RB16B, as Perez discovered, but Verstappen just dealt with it.

His 10 poles were the most of any driver, confirming the Red Bull package's place as the season's best, even if the team occasionally squandered that advantage. Verstappen's

speed has never been in question, but his season was peppered with little errors – slipping off the road passing Hamilton in Bahrain and never getting another chance to win there; doing so when running in front of him in Portugal and falling behind; dipping a wheel on the grass at Imola and losing pole; throwing away the early lead in France and having to battle back.

His Q3 crash in Jeddah was the best example of this. Verstappen delivered 90% of potentially one of F1's best-ever qualifying laps, but made a minor lock-up at the final corner and couldn't accept it, booting the car out of the hairpin when it was too wide and hitting the wall when the gripless rear kicked out. There was a sense that a moment to win the title had been lost, but his response in Abu Dhabi qualifying was majestic.

AUTOSPORT SAYS

During a run of form where Verstappen seemed irresistible, who would head our top 50 wasn't a debate – the Dutchman was clearly the best driver. But that view slowly changed. It really started after the Monza crash with Lewis Hamilton, because that ugly incident extended a run of clashes between the pair where Verstappen had been overly aggressive.

At Imola Hamilton had been trying to hang on around the outside line, but Verstappen was ruthless in seeing him out of road (as was his right). But at Barcelona his Turn 1 pass required Hamilton to turn out of contact. At Silverstone the roles were reversed, with Hamilton rightly penalised, but it was a close call. At Monza both had a chance to back out, but Verstappen's unwillingness to accept the situation after a slow stop had dropped him out of the victory fight ultimately led to what could have been a very nasty outcome.

Brazil was a key moment. Verstappen's actions in the Turn 4 incident were as aggressive as F1 had come to expect, but by sliding wide – he blamed worn tyres – he left himself vulnerable to an officiating call that never came. And that led to the unedifying display in Jeddah, because from Verstappen's point of view he could go up to that line (over the real white ones) and it was fine. Except it never was.

You could sense Hamilton's exasperation over repeated moves of such intense aggression in the shove he gave back after their bizarre crash ahead of the final corner. It's a feeling many shared – that Verstappen was just going too far, with no respect for fair play.

He is seemingly willing to do whatever it takes to win, although not as outrageously as some in F1 history, but it's why the FIA was wrong not to intervene in Brazil. He's so fast, so talented, so unbelievably mentally adept in the most intense racing situations, that he is a deserving champion and would be number one in this list. But all those incidents count for too much of what isn't acceptable in motorsport.



STILL THE BEST...

BUT ONLY JUST

LEWIS HAMILTON

—NO CHANGE

2nd in Formula 1 World Championship

Well, he finally got what he said he wanted. Many times during his run to becoming statistically Formula 1's greatest driver, Lewis Hamilton claimed he'd welcome all challengers to Mercedes' domination. It had long looked like Max Verstappen and Red Bull would be the combination most likely to threaten the Hamilton/Mercedes twin thrones. Ferrari was too inconsistent in the years it won races before 2020, where Charles Leclerc's potential challenge was blunted by the team losing its controversial power prowess.

In 2021, Hamilton and Mercedes and Verstappen and Red Bull went head-to-head in a thrilling title battle that went down to the wire. It was a championship for the Netflix era, but still had plenty for traditional motorsport fans to enjoy. The championship outcome was different – at least at the time of writing. But for the fifth year in a row, Hamilton tops this list.

However, the 2021 Hamilton was different. This time around there were errors – and big ones, too – while occasionally he was absent in shockingly unexpected fashion, losing out to team-mate Valtteri Bottas in the critical areas of tyre warm-up and management. But the all-conquering, brilliant Hamilton was there too – with peaks higher than those even the brilliant Verstappen could reach. These peaks were surrounded by the impressive ones the Dutchman was scaling around him, and they rose very late in the year. >>



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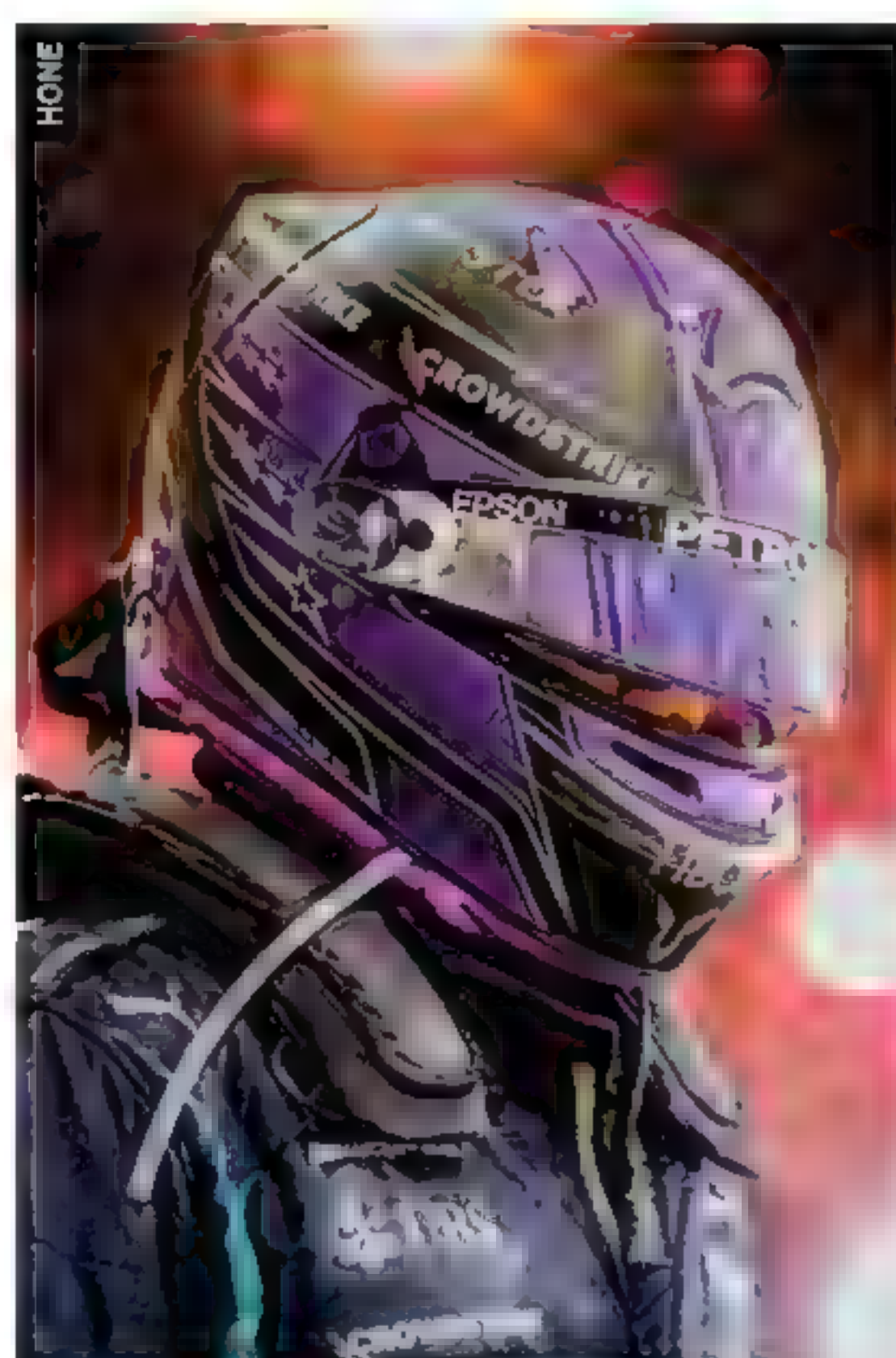
The 2021 season did not start well for Mercedes. For the first time since 2013, it was behind from the off, with Red Bull possessing the year's best package – confirmed by its season-opening pole in Bahrain and 10 poles across the year to Mercedes' nine. But Hamilton – although he won the first race with a brilliant display of tyre management and guile, one that still needed Verstappen to err – was also far from his usual form early on.

At Imola, he made his first major mistake, slipping off the road in the damp conditions at the Tosa hairpin while lapping George Russell and getting stuck in the gravel on the outside for a minute. Verstappen – in control of the race after edging his rival's outside attack at the Tamborello chicane on the opening lap across the kerbs – lapped him. Only the red flag resulting from the crash involving the two drivers vying to be his 2022 team-mate got Hamilton out of that predicament, as he was gifted the lap back by the red flag and then put in another famous charge from the rear to rescue second ahead of Lando Norris and Leclerc.

"I knew I couldn't afford to lose another seven points," says Hamilton, speaking in a media roundtable that included Motorsport.com's Jonathan Noble. "Looking back, you could say, 'Was I too hasty, too aggressive?' Maybe. And I'll tell you, it hurt a lot going into that gravel. If I'd just been a tiny bit more patient and waited until after that corner to lap the backmarkers... but all I could think of was catching Max in the moment, right? So that wasn't great. That was a real mistake."

Monaco would be better described as an overall underperformance, where Hamilton struggled badly with Mercedes' tyre warm-up issues, worse than Bottas, who chased Verstappen up front after Leclerc failed to start. The Finn would retire in the pits due to a machined wheelnut, while Hamilton

"IF I'D JUST BEEN A TINY BIT MORE PATIENT AND WAITED TO LAP THE BACKMARKERS..."



came home seventh, frustrated by his team's strategy call behind Pierre Gasly, but at least bagged the fastest lap point.

That weekend was followed immediately by Baku, where Mercedes was again in trouble

getting the softer tyres to heat up. This time, Hamilton led the way for the Black Arrows, but Red Bull was in complete control until Verstappen's tyre blew out with five laps remaining. That gave Hamilton the chance to attack the hydraulic-pressure problem-hobbled Sergio Perez, but he locked up at the restart's first corner and went from likely race winner to last in an instant and cloud of tyre torture after accidentally activating his car's 'magic' brake bias alteration system. But Hamilton doesn't view this "as a driver's mistake".

"It was more a mechanical problem," he adds. "It literally was a mistake waiting to happen."

That is a logical explanation now the button has been shrouded, but still must go down as Hamilton's own error given that he had not done it before. It extended his fallow run through the late spring and early summer – where he didn't win again after his Portugal and Spain back-to-back triumphs, with the latter a classic Hamilton/Mercedes victory by outfoxing Red Bull on strategy and the Briton delivering the charge as needed, and as Verstappen failed to do in Bahrain.

Verstappen did win in such bold, attacking-strategy circumstances at Paul Ricard, shattering Mercedes' success stranglehold at the French Grand Prix. Then he dominated both races in Austria, with Hamilton not conclusively absolved of picking up the rear brake damage that meant he came home fourth in the second race there – given he wasn't noticeably offline when the damage became apparent, but with the track's fearsome kerbs always a danger. >>



But plenty of what made 2021 different to 2020 stemmed from the technical rule changes that straddled the two seasons. Mercedes and Aston Martin, the two teams running low-rake aerodynamic profiles, were hit hardest by the mandated cuts to the rear of the floors, among other minor changes at the back.

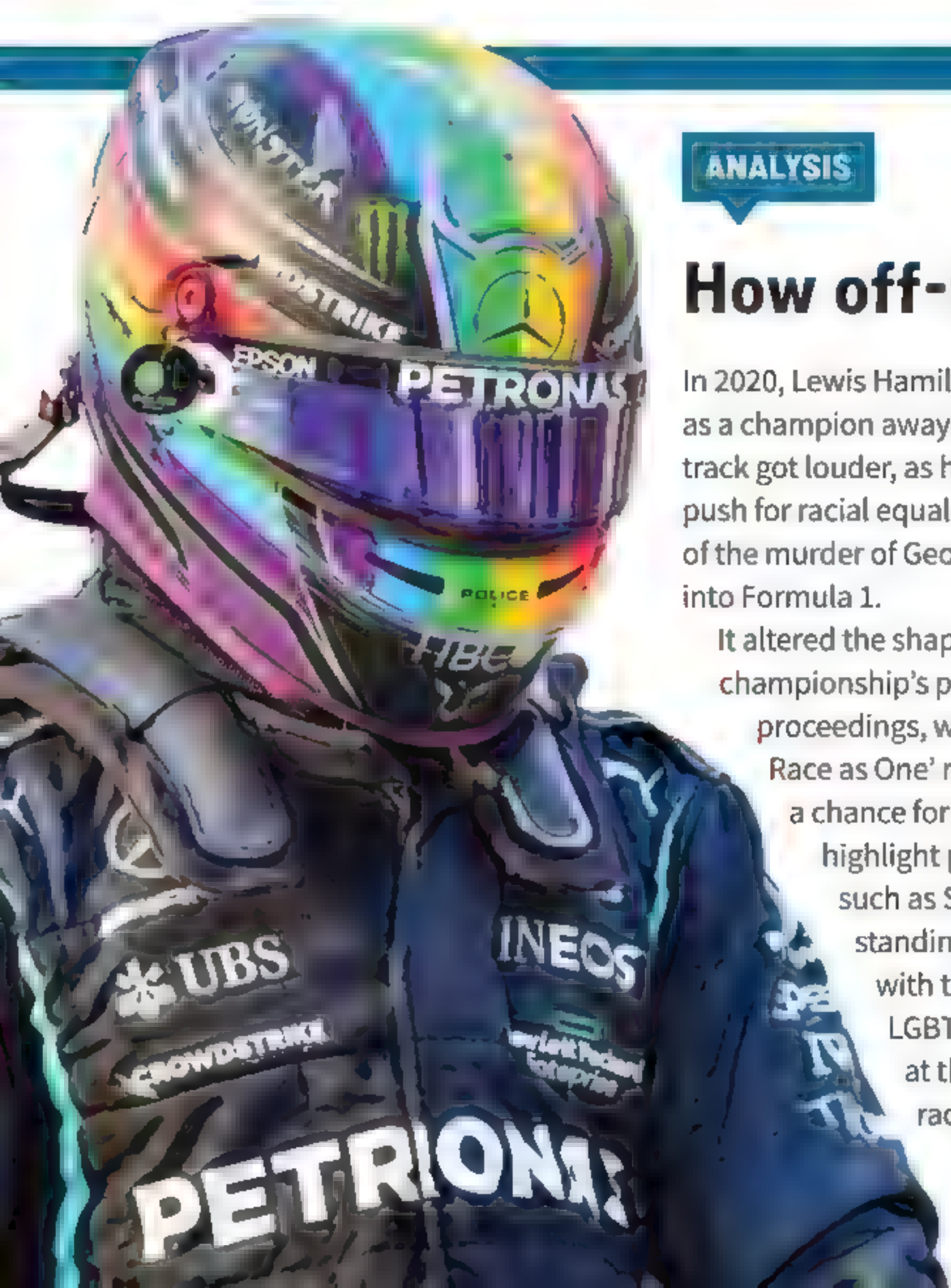
When these changes were allied with the carryover car requirements and the unique clampdown on development as per F1 and the FIA's move to cut costs for the teams during the pandemic, Mercedes did not have a lot of room to develop its way out of trouble. It's last upgrade

"I WANT TO BE THE PUREST OF DRIVERS - THROUGH SPEED, HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION"

package arrived at Silverstone, after Hamilton had called on his squad to "find some performance" through aerodynamic development, and from then on things were much closer with Red Bull. Mercedes also worked to overcome the W12's limitations through set-up experiments aimed at getting it back to the "sweet spot" Hamilton highlights it enjoyed with the W11.

But this was hard, with Hamilton calling his 2021 car "a monster of a diva" that was "harder to get in the right window" compared to any previous Mercedes. This, he felt, meant he was "just not able to maximise my ability through the set-up not being in the right place".

The pandemic continued to hang over the F1 world just as much as the rest of society. But where last year's championship was squeezed into six months, the much-altered 2021 calendar occupied the same nine-month stretch as before the global health crisis unfolded. For Hamilton and the rest,



ANALYSIS

How off-track activities keep Hamilton motivated

In 2020, Lewis Hamilton's voice as a champion away from the race track got louder, as he brought the push for racial equality in the wake of the murder of George Floyd into Formula 1.

It altered the shape of the championship's pre-race proceedings, with the 'We Race as One' moment now a chance for drivers to highlight particular causes, such as Sebastian Vettel standing in solidarity with the Hungarian LGBTQ+ community at the Budapest race in July.

Hamilton used other tools available to him to get messages across in 2021. He continued to be one of the few drivers to regularly offer thoughts on important topics in his press appearances, but the rainbow helmet livery - which he ran in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi to close out the season - that he used to make his own stand with the LGBTQ+ communities in those countries with poor human rights records overall was a new gesture for him.

In a year when Hamilton admits he struggled to get his work/life balance right thanks to the requirement to isolate so much to stay safe from COVID, it was some of his off-track

work that he says helped him considerably. Last year he founded the Hamilton Commission, which is committed to improving representation of black people in UK motorsport, and in July it published its report, 'Accelerating Change', after 10 months of research in conjunction with the Royal Academy of Engineering. The report established 10 key recommendations for improving diversity in motorsport.

"When you have time separate from the races, when you're trying to figure out what to apply your time and effort towards, sometimes you're putting time and effort into something that doesn't give anything



this has meant isolating for longer and undertaking fewer or more restricted social interactions. He knew the importance of this discipline better than the majority of the grid after his absence from the 2020 Sakhir GP, which led to him be wary to keep a distance and even “hold your breath around everyone”. Such demands, he says, made 2021 “much harder” as it was “harder to find a balance in normal life, in and around your work life”.

The long-term effects of his COVID bout – and sources suggest Hamilton’s illness 12 months ago was deeply unpleasant for the world champion – are well known. After finishing second in the wild Hungarian GP he had started bizarrely solo on the grid, held at bay for so long in a thrilling contest

with former team-mate and fierce rival Fernando Alonso, Hamilton had to check in with Mercedes’ doctor and was visibly uncomfortable on the podium. He suggested at the time he may have been suffering from lingering effects of the virus, but stopped short of outright saying he had long-COVID. But as the season’s end approached, he felt “like it’s gone”.

For the first time since 2016, Hamilton headed out of the Abu Dhabi paddock contemplating defeat to a bitter rival. But he heads our list once again. And there are two key reasons why – both of which we witnessed in the Brazilian GP weekend.

Hamilton had stayed in the hunt throughout the late summer and early autumn – beginning with his controversial victory on home soil at Silverstone. Verstappen then lost further big ground thanks to Bottas’s shocking gaffe at the start in Hungary, but was gifted five points on Hamilton in the Spa farce. Then came their second big crash at Monza and Hamilton’s win in Russia even after taking an engine-change grid penalty, a factor that also limited his potential in Turkey. Austin was a surprise defeat to Verstappen, who dominated as expected in Mexico, with Hamilton ruining getting such a good start that he and Bottas were unable to block the Red Bull as they’d planned on the long run to Turn 1.

But Brazil brought out his best. In reaction to being disqualified from Friday qualifying ‘pole’ for his DRS screws being loose and his rear wing therefore failing scrutineering, Hamilton found his top form. He charged from last to fifth in 2021’s final sprint race, then took his final fresh internal combustion engine from 10th to grand prix victory – Toto Wolff saying after he’d carried this exceptional form to a dominant Qatar victory: “He’s absolutely on it – brutal – and cold-blooded.” To win in Brazil he had to pass Verstappen, who defended up to and past the point of acceptability at Turn 4 – where F1 race director Michael Masi should have clamped down on his driving, as it



led Verstappen to believe he could act as he did again, unacceptably, in Jeddah.

After Verstappen’s off-track actions at Turn 4, Hamilton “chose a different line” but “still managed to get him to dart to the inside, which really put him off”. Then he “managed to have a different line to hold on to him” in a move that was “pre-planned” and brilliant. Silverstone was on Hamilton – but it was the move of a driver not backing down in the face of repeated uber-aggression, and knowing there was “a need to gain points and you have to get a little bit less willing to give up too much” fearing car damage in such circumstances, as he wisely did in Spain and the second Jeddah start. He was rightly penalised at Silverstone, but it was a close call.

“I want to be the purest of drivers – through speed, through sheer hard work and determination,” Hamilton says of his approach to racing. And that is, ultimately, why he tops this list. He so nearly won in a slower car and produced the highest peaks of his F1 game late in the year. That, allied to his cleaner racecraft, means he is, once again, the year’s best. 🏆



back or it doesn’t have any long-lasting impact,” Hamilton says. “So, to finally find something that has real purpose and real potential change and shift for the industry and for people – that feels super rewarding. So, yeah, to be able to focus on something other than racing, it’s great. It takes the pressure right off.”



MEET THE RISING STARS BATTLING FOR £200,000

The four 2021 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award finalists have done all their fitness, simulator and driving tests. Now it's just a matter of waiting to find out who the winner is – and looking ahead to the new season

KEVIN TURNER





ALL PHOTOGRAPHY
motorsport
IMAGES

L to r: Edgar,
Foster, Bearman
and O'Sullivan have
battled for Aston
Martin honours

FERRARO



STALEY

OLLIE BEARMAN

AGE 16 2021 Italian and German F4 champion with Van Amersfoort

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN MOTORSPORT?

It came mostly from my dad's side of the family. My dad and uncle raced when they were younger, and my grandad as well. I remember, when I was four or five, going to Brands Hatch and Donington Park, watching them race. I always found myself at race tracks, smelling the burning rubber and fumes, and starting to fall in love with it. My mum took me karting to Buckmore Park and from there I got a go-kart for Christmas – thanks Santa! – and have never looked back since. It's got a bit more serious and expensive since then but I'm still loving every moment.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR 2021

This season has been the highlight of my career so far. We set out the clear goal to win the championship, initially just Italian F4. We started off with selected rounds of German F4 but after the first two rounds I was leading the championship and it would be rude not to continue! I'm happy it paid off. It's really nice to be also picked up by Ferrari – they've seen the potential I guess – and the recognition is encouraging.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE AWARD TESTS WENT?

I really looked forward to the challenge of driving the GT3 and LMP3 as they're quite different to what I'm used to. It could be something that opens a door for the future. I really enjoyed driving the GT3 – although it's the slowest lap time it was probably the most rewarding – and the LMP3 has a lot of grip in the high speed. The F2 was mega so I can't really pick a favourite car. We all knew each other quite well and it was a really cool experience but we steered clear of the subject of lap times. I felt like I left everything on the track – maybe not the maximum out of the GT3 car – but in the F2 and LMP3 car I did my absolute best and that's all I can do.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM YOU IN 2022?

I've signed with Ferrari Driver Academy, so they're sort of dictating my career. For me there are only two options – FIA Formula 3 or Formula Regional European. Most of the tracks I've raced on in F4 are on those calendars so it's less of a step into the unknown. >>



JONNY EDGAR

AGE 17 2021 18th in FIA F3 (rookie season) with Carlin

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN MOTORSPORT?

A lot of people in my family have raced in karting – grandad and grandma, my uncles. Pretty much from when I was born I was always at a kart track on the weekends when my dad was racing. Not long after I was three years old I drove a kart for the first time and I've been racing since I was eight. I always wanted to be a Formula 1 driver, and at the end of 2017, after I won the European championships in karting, I joined the Red Bull junior team. Then they put me in F4 in 2019.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR 2021

It was Red Bull's choice to go straight from F4 [where he was 2020 German champion] to F3. It's a huge step from F4 – the braking, the downforce, the tyres. You go from F4 doing a minimum of two days at every track you race on to maybe 40 minutes on a track you haven't driven on, and you maybe haven't driven a car for six weeks, so it's quite different. It was difficult because, even if you're not winning, you want to be up at the front. Some weekends were better than others

but the main thing was trying to do the best you can with what you have.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE AWARD TESTS WENT?

The GT3 was quite different, with ABS and traction control, and the weight of the car was unlike what I'm used to. The LMP3 was probably the car I liked the best. It quite surprised me; I didn't think it would feel that quick, but in the high speed I really liked how the car felt. I don't think I've driven more than one car in a day before. It wasn't too bad – the first lap in the LMP3 car I braked at the GT3 point and realised that's too early, but it was fairly easy to adjust.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM YOU IN 2022?

It's looking like FIA F3 again with a different team. I think it's good to repeat a championship because you have experience of some of the tracks and the car. Especially after a difficult year it's good to make sure you have a good year before moving up. A year of experience can make a big difference.



ZAK O'SULLIVAN

AGE 16 2021 GB3 champion with Carlin

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN MOTORSPORT?

My dad had a vague interest in cars and watched F1. I followed suit and fell in love with the sport then – it was the Michael Schumacher-Fernando Alonso and Alonso-Lewis Hamilton era. That was the starting point of my love of cars, and when I was seven we went to the Autosport show and we saw a go-kart on sale. After a year of pleading I got given a Bambino kart and it went from there – I practised drifting in a derelict tennis court near home! Due to some struggles in karting, after a tricky year in 2018, I decided to go to Ginetta Junior to get out of the karting scene and try my hand in cars. I enjoyed that year and it put me in good stead to go to F4.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR 2021

My target was to learn. Part of the reason of staying in the UK rather than go to Europe was to learn a bit more. The competition is still pretty high and it was saving a bit of money before stepping up into more international series where you get noticed slightly more. It was the first year I got to see different team philosophies playing out throughout the year –





LOUIS FOSTER

AGE 18 2021 Runner-up in Euroformula Open with CryptoTower

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN MOTORSPORT?

Motorsport runs in my family. Grandad wrote initial rulebooks for karting in the Blue Book with the MSA [now Motorsport UK] and dad [Nick Foster] used to do some rallying, then did some GT and touring car stuff. I started karting at five years old with my brother and dad as a fun thing to do, then jumped into Ginetta Junior and each year progressed up the ladder. Racing is all I've really known. I really enjoy it – it's a thrill you don't get anywhere else.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR 2021

The season was amazing. I'd finished British F3 up there in 2020 and there wasn't much point in doing a second year. Euroformula Open went really well, particularly at the tracks where I had previous experience. The tracks where I didn't have that were quite tricky, that was probably the biggest challenge. It was for learning – and I say this after every year: my ambition isn't to be British F4 champion, British F3 champion, Euroformula champion, it's to learn and get to IndyCar. At this stage of my career it's all about

learning and I've learned 100 times more in the [old-spec F3] Euroformula car than I would have done in Formula Regional.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE AWARD TESTS WENT?

Once I understand how a car works I can perform a lot better. I think we saw this in the Award with the MSV F2 car. Once I'd figured it out and was comfortable I was able to push more and my pace drastically improved. Towards the end of the second F2 day was when I was able to give it everything, so those sessions were good. I enjoyed driving all the cars. I struggled a little bit with the GT3 car, it was quite different to what I've driven before, but I really enjoyed the LMP3.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM YOU IN 2022?

Most likely I'll do Indy Pro 2000. The plan is to win that, get the scholarship money, then go to Indy Lights, win that, win the scholarship money and go to IndyCar. Obviously that puts a bit more pressure on – the next two years I have to win to get the prize money. Then hopefully have a successful career in IndyCar.

there were some circuits we went to we knew we wouldn't quite be as strong compared to Hitech and Fortec, and others where we knew we'd be strong due to the way we ran the car.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE AWARD TESTS WENT?

All the cars were pretty different to what I expected. The LMP3 was a lot pointier than I thought, the F2 car was a chunk faster. It was quite a big step up. The GT3 was pretty forgiving to drive and suited my driving style so I quite enjoyed that. It was a really cool experience. The hardest thing was jumping from the GT3 back into the F2, when I realised I had all this grip and had to brake later. I think we all had a pretty good idea we were quite close.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM YOU IN 2022?

The plan is FIA F3. I think I've learned enough in GB3 and that seems the logical step. I did the November test in Valencia, learned about the car and compared quite well to team-mates. I'm looking forward to it, it should be good fun.



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- Attending Rally Steering Group meetings.
- Preparing BRC Awards function and ordering the awards.
- Being the liaison link for all championship stakeholders including competitors, events, partners and suppliers.
- Appointing the media team and working on the promotion plan for the season and on event
- Preparing and distributing a media review after each round/ the season.
- Supporting with event rally and event consultancy.
- Supporting the Rallies Executive as required, both with project work as well as day to day governance and regulatory activities.
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- Ensuring that the UK influences the setting of International Standards by FIA.
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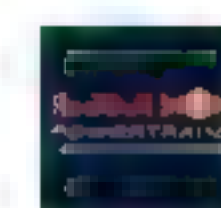
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- Strong problem solving, mathematical and analytical skills.
- Solid understanding of numerical methods, optimisation, statistics and control theory.
- Very strong knowledge of vehicle dynamics and lap time simulation concepts, as well as practical experience in these fields.
- Ability to work effectively within a cross-functional team and with minimal supervision.
- Capacity to report complex technical information concisely and professionally to tight deadlines.
- Extensive coding experience in MATLAB/Simulink and C/C++.

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JOBS**Race Team Operations Administrator**
Haas F1 Team

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- Collaborate with the Race Team Operations Coordinator and Race Team Operations Manager in establishing systems to ensure that the company complies with its obligations under the terms of its HGV Operators License.
- Assist and provide cover for the Logistics Coordinator when required.
- Support the Race Team Operations Coordinator in the day-to-day running of the transport and freight elements of the business
- Support the Race Team Operations Coordinator with the preparation of maintenance schedules, movement planners and associated documentation for the successful organisation of the team's fleet of race transporters and vans.
- Support the Race Team Operations Coordinator and Race Team Operations Manager with preparation of air and sea freight shipping documents.
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- (CAD) Computer Aided Design – CATIA V5, 3DEXperience
- (CAE) Computer Aided Engineering – Abaqus, CCM+, Hyperworks, LSDyna
- (PDM) Product Data Management – Enovia VPM V4, 3DCOM, 3DEXperience
- (PLM) Product Lifecycle Management – Bespoke systems, 3DEXperience
- (CAM) Computer Aided Manufacturing – various including DelCam, Openmind, Geomagic, PC-DMIS, Vericut, PowerInspect, GOM

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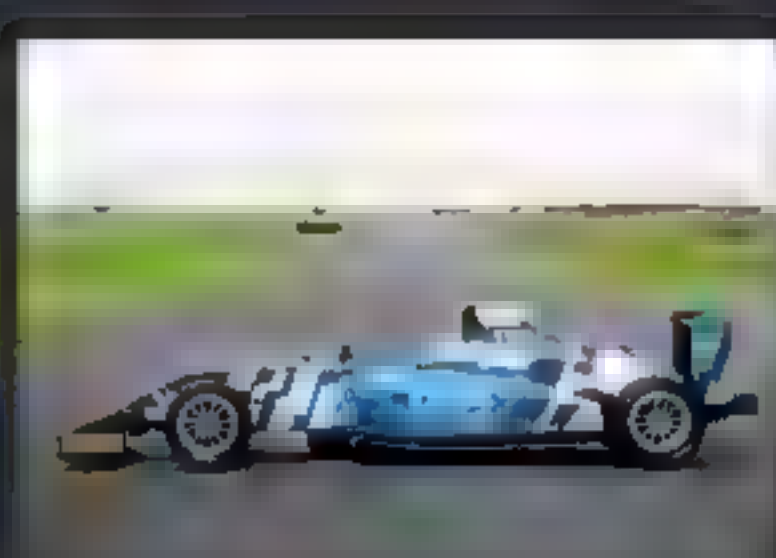
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(BRITISH GT/GB3)



**28/29 MAY
DONINGTON PARK GP**

(BRITISH GT/GB3)



**25/26 JUNE
SNETTERTON 300**

(BRITISH GT/GB3)



**30/31 JULY
SILVERSTONE GP**

(GB3)



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**15/16 OCTOBER
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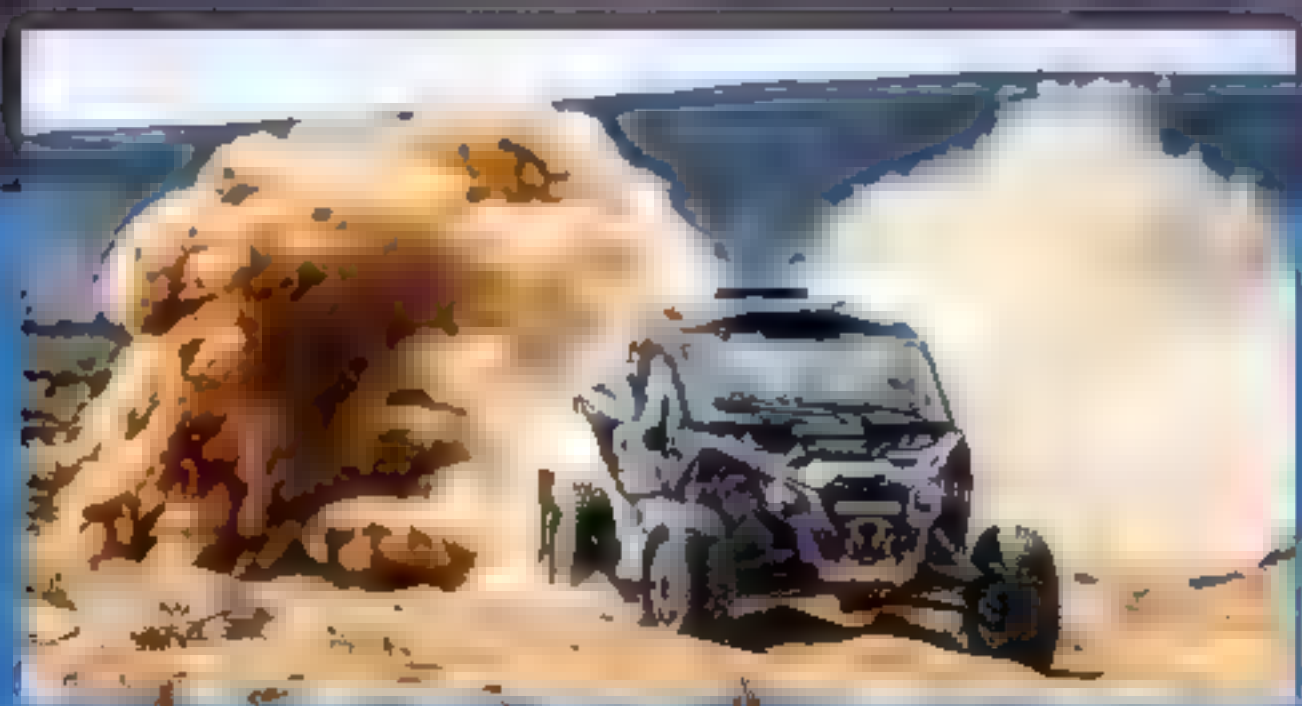
TCR UK Series to get standalone grids again in 2022

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De Sadeleer has swapped his Radical for very different buggy

RADICAL ACE DE SADELEER PREPARES FOR DAKAR BID

DAKAR RALLY

Radical Challenge race winner Jerome de Sadeleer is preparing for a very different sort of test as he prepares to tackle the Dakar Rally next month.

The German-based Swiss will be driving in his first Dakar, and will be following in the footsteps of his father Stanislas, who took part in 2006. De Sadeleer Jr has completed several off-road events to get ready for the challenge.

His previous motorsport experience has come in very different machinery; he started racing Radicals in the UK in 2017, and then came within a sticking wheelnut of winning the title two years later. While the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that de Sadeleer has only been able to compete sporadically for the past two seasons, his focus turned to trying other disciplines, competing in C1 Race Series and Fun Cup endurance contests.

A conversation with a Saudi friend then led to de Sadeleer targeting the Dakar. "He is influential in both motorsport and the industry there and had spectated on the Dakar Rally and decided he wanted to get involved," said de Sadeleer. "We discussed things and set up a team, looked at buggies and that's how the new adventure started."

They have a custom-built chassis –

a BRP Can-Am Maverick – with a 900cc Rotax engine that is lightweight and gives out 205bhp. "I did the Baja Aragon in it in July, my first event with co-driver Mika Metge, an ex-Honda and Yamaha bike rider who has done seven Dakars," explained de Sadeleer.

They came third overall out of 35 teams and immediately made plans to contest the Rallye du Maroc in October. The Moroccan event proved to be a tough baptism for the Team Galag crew, who came away seventh in the T4 class and 26th overall.

"To be honest, it was a much harder rally than I had anticipated," admitted de Sadeleer. "That being said, we generally had very good race pace, and I think we gained extremely valuable experience. There are a few updates that need to be made to the buggy, and we will definitely come out stronger at our next rally."

With the vehicles and equipment leaving for the Dakar event even earlier than usual due to coronavirus restrictions, de Sadeleer has had time to prepare himself. "It's organised chaos, getting ready for three weeks on the road and only having time to recoup your energy on a blow-up bed in your tent," he said. "But it's a new challenge and I am very much looking forward to it."

PETER SCHERER

TCR UK BACK TO HAVING ITS OWN GRID FOR 2022

TCR UK

TCR UK will revert to being a standalone championship next year after being granted a permit by Motorsport UK.

The category has run within the Touring Car Trophy for the past three years, but this season the TCT's grids have increased despite only a trio of part-season entries from non-TCR machinery.

"It's got to where it needs to be now," said Stewart Lines of promoter Maximum Motorsport, which has had its licence to run the UK championship extended to 2027 by TCR founder the WSC Group. "It's TCR only and we're running to WSC regulations so it's quite simple to understand."

"There's a load of new drivers, lots of new cars. It's good value for money. A TCR car now, a second-hand one, you can buy for £60,000. They're factory-made cars [and] the manufacturers are involved supporting teams."

The move also confirms that the Volkswagen Racing Cup – which has run alongside TCT for the past two seasons – will not be relaunched after low entries led to its mid-season abandonment this year. "If someone wants to do a cheaper series, Civic Cup's for them – that's our feeder series," said Lines.

In addition to livestreaming its races, TCR UK will also boast television coverage on free-to-air channel FreeSports. Lines said: "We're having an hour-long show for every round and it's going to focus on the drivers and teams."

MARK PAULSON



Focus on parity with British F4's bespoke engine

BRITISH F4

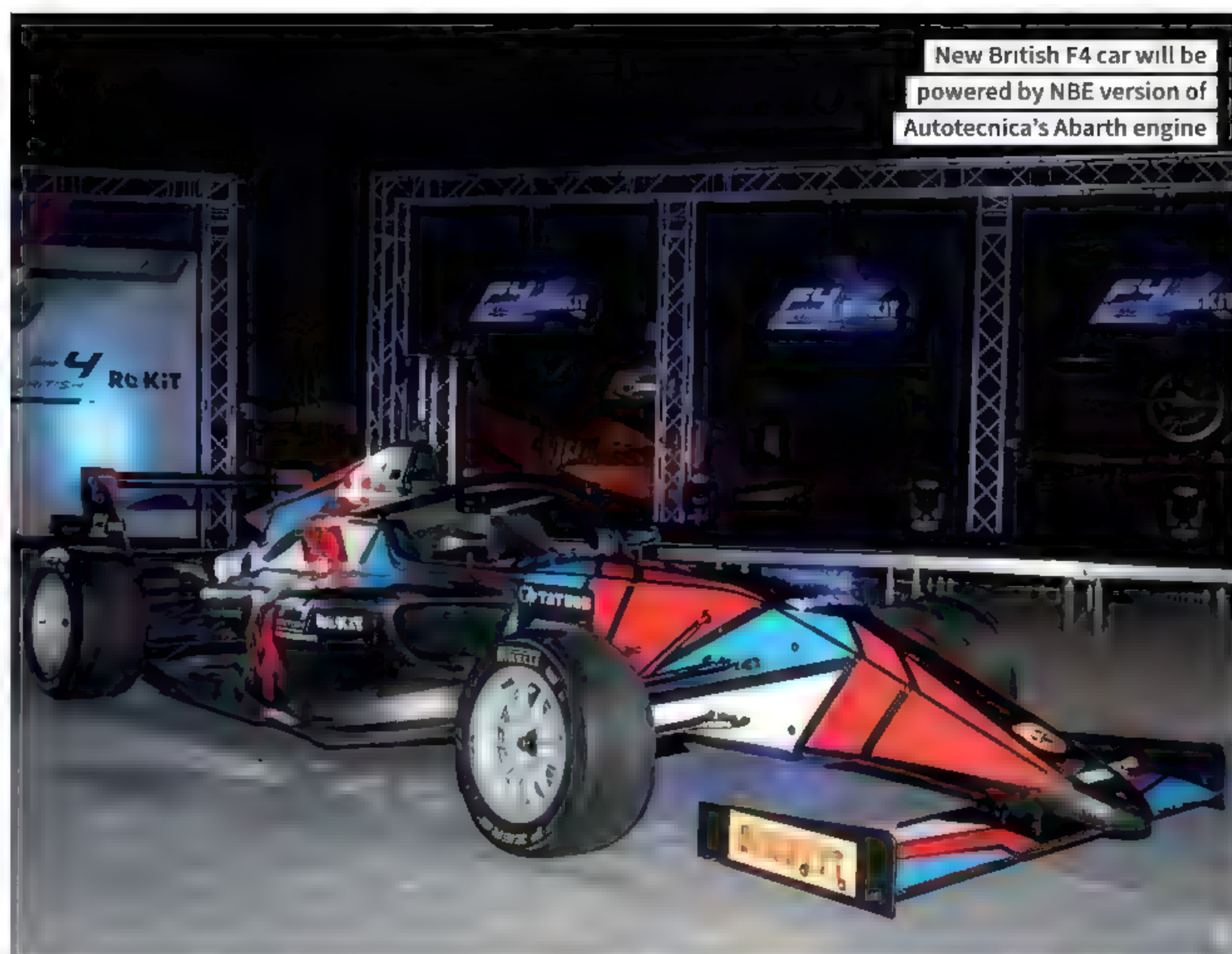
Motorsport UK has revealed more details about the bespoke Neil Brown Engineering-created engine that will be used in British Formula 4 next season, explaining that its key differences to the Autotecnica-built motor featured in various European F4 series relate to the turbo.

The category is undergoing a major revamp for 2022 as British motorsport's governing body takes over as organiser and it switches to an Abarth-powered Tatuus chassis from the outgoing Mygale-Ford.

NBE has been British F4's tuning partner since 2018, when it took over from Sodemo, and is widely credited with ensuring greater parity between the Ford EcoBoost engines.

"Mechanically, the engine will be very much the same," explained Motorsport UK safety, sport and technical director John Ryan. "It's a lot about the mapping and to equalise the performance, but also the turbocharger itself."

Motorsport UK CEO Hugh Chambers acknowledges that, by having a bespoke engine, it means that teams wishing to compete in other European F4 series will need to buy or loan a different motor, but feels that having a greater focus on the parity of the powerplants is vital.



"You could say it would be much easier if they were all the same engines, but we've stuck firmly to the fact that equalisation is absolutely crucial, that is our competitive advantage," said Chambers.

"We had a blank sheet of paper, we said, 'Look, you tell us Neil Brown Engineering, do the evaluations with Autotecnica and what do you recommend needs to be done?' They went through the checklist, and they've come down to the only hardware change is the turbo and then the mapping that goes with it."

As part of the equalisation process, all of the power units will be comprehensively assessed at least twice per season. Ryan added that working with NBE brings continuity to the start of British F4's new era, while pointing out other benefits from having the engines looked after in the UK.

"If we had to start always sending things over to Italy to have them checked, obviously that would cost time, money and we don't have that direct contact with teams and the engine provider," he said.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

New car makes race debut in Abu Dhabi

FORMULA 4

The Tatuus T-421 that will be the basis for the new-look British Formula 4 Championship made its competition debut last weekend, supporting the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

Ten examples of the Abarth-powered, halo-fitted machine took to the track at Yas Marina for a non-championship curtain-raiser to the United Arab Emirates F4 series, which kicks off next month. Shipping issues on the Genoa to Dubai route meant many cars were

stranded at sea, and only those who had air-freighted their racers made the grid.

Prema Powerteam's Mercedes F1 junior Andrea Kimi Antonelli, who made his car racing debut after his 15th birthday by contesting the final three rounds of this year's Italian F4 series, claimed pole position.

An early spin scuppered Antonelli's chances, and Charlie Wurz — the 16-year-old son of former Le Mans 24 Hours winner and F1 racer Alexander — took victory from Conrad Laursen and Antonelli in a Prema 1-2-3.



"The race has been a success," proclaimed Prema boss Rene Rosin. "We ran the race with not any problem with the car itself, and we gave a bit of a show. Tatuus and Autotecnica made an amazing job. I was worried that the drivers would say it was more heavy [with the halo] but no one complained.

Everybody fitted immediately with the car and it was good out of the box."

Rosin added that prior to the two sessions of free practice on Friday and qualifying on Saturday before Sunday's race, the only mileage was a half-hour shakedown on the Thursday.

MARCUS SIMMONS

Albert and Docker tackled two GT Cup events in 2021



Former British GT ace Albert to partner Docker in Fox McLaren

GT CUP

Former British GT racer Jordan Albert and 2019 Britcar runner-up Tim Docker plan to contest a full season of the GT Cup next year in a Fox Motorsport McLaren.

The duo teamed up for two events this season in the 570S GT4 and took a podium, and are extending the partnership as former TCR racer Docker looks to return to competition full-time.

Albert has raced sporadically in British GT since making the switch from single-seaters in 2016, but was forced to step down from driving a Ford Mustang in 2020 amid sponsorship woes when

fighting for the GT4 title.

"I'm really pleased that Tim and I are coming back for a full season in GT Cup," said Albert. "The series is at an all-time high in terms of the quality and quantity, especially in GTH [the class for GT4 machinery]."

"The pre-season testing will be crucial in making sure we're right in the mix for wins and podiums from the word go, and I'd hope for a mix of weather during that period so we can boost Tim's experience in low-grip conditions. The McLaren is very different to the TCRs he's more used to and the more track time he can get, the stronger we'll be."

Howell to race Ekris M4 for new team

BRITISH GT

British Touring Car Championship race winner Gareth Howell will return to British GT next season for the first time since 2017 in a new team entered under the Inspire Racing banner, with a BMW-based M4.

The 40-year-old chief test driver for Gordon Murray Automotive won three BTCC races in part-season campaigns with Team Dynamics Honda Integra in 2005 and 2006. He

previously raced alongside his 2022 team-mate Richard Marsh when they paired up for two outings in an In2Racing McLaren 570S GT4 in 2017.

The duo have reunited to drive an Ekris M4 – this was released before BMW's own GT4 car and is therefore homologated separately – in the Pro-Am class.

The car, which is making its series debut, won the 2017 GT4 European Series Northern Cup with 1999 Formula Ford Festival victor Ricardo van

der Ende and Max Koebolt. Both Howell and Marsh have tested the Ekris machine, which Howell described as a "proven, quick car".

Marsh, a BTCC regular between 2003 and 2007, has assembled the new team, which will promote "a purpose beyond purely racing" due to be announced next year.

"It's important stuff – we can't wait for people to see it as we know many will want to get involved," he said.

JAMES NEWBOLD

IN THE HEADLINES

SMITH BACK WITH DOUGLAS

Australian Tommy Smith will return to the GB3 Championship in 2022 with Douglas Motorsport, after racing part-time with the team this season. The 19-year-old competed at three meetings, taking a best result of 12th, and will rejoin the squad alongside American Walter Hayes Trophy winner Max Esterson. "I really enjoyed the selected rounds of GB3 that I competed in during 2021 as a part of my first season in Europe," said Smith. "That experience allows me to carry confidence going into 2022."

VSCC TO BEGIN AT CADWELL

The Vintage Sports-Car Club's circuit racing season is due to begin at Cadwell Park next April rather than with its traditional Silverstone opener. The club changed its initially planned Silverstone date to avoid clashing with the later Goodwood Members' Meeting, and will instead visit the Northamptonshire circuit in July. Its other two racing dates are due to be at Donington Park (June) and Mallory Park (August).

HYUNDAI JBRC PRIZE DRIVE

The Junior British Rally champion will again benefit from the chance of contesting a European round of the World Rally Championship in 2023 with Hyundai as a prize for winning the title. It will be the third time that such a reward for the champion has been available, with 2019 victor Josh McErlean going on to become a Hyundai Junior after his prize drive.

LITTLE STEP TO BRITCAR

The father-and-son duo of James and Jake Little are looking at stepping up to Britcar next season and were busy testing a Valluga Racing Porsche Cayman at Donington Park last week (below). "After winning in the C1s at Oulton Park this season, we want to carry on with that, but move up to Britcar too if we can," said Little Sr.



Fresh car for Pollard in quest for second title

FORMULA VEE

Formula Vee contender Craig Pollard has acquired Graham Gant's 2019 title-winning WEV as he seeks to topple arch rivals James Harridge and Daniel Hands in next year's championship.

After their intense rivalry in 2021, Pollard, Harridge and Hands have confirmed that they all intend return to the category for 2022, with Harridge's self-run Maverick and Hands's AHS Dominator both expected to feature new upgrades.

Pollard has opted to switch from his Bears Motorsport-run GAC, and Gant will help oversee the running of the WEV.

"I tested the WEV [Worm's Eye View] on the Friday at the final round at Oulton Park and it was monstrously quick – the grip at the front end was like it was fixed to railway lines," raved 2018 champion Pollard. "Every component on the car has been developed to within an inch of its life and having Graham helping is an added bonus."

Two-time and reigning champion



Harridge said: "We've got upgrades to the suspension coming and maybe something on the engine side as well. I'd love to make it a hat-trick in 2022 – nobody has won three FVee titles in a row – but I think it'll be even harder than in 2021."

Hands, champion in 2008, added: "This year's Dominator Mk2 was all-new – engine, gearbox, suspension, chassis, everything – and we lost ground with

some mechanical problems early on as we learnt more about it.

"If we can start 2022 as we ended 2021, when we started to put the results together, then I feel quite confident, but Craig in the WEV is going to be hard to beat. I think we are all very equal as drivers so it will be down to finding something with the cars that probably makes the difference."

CARL MCKELLAR

Harrison joins Classic Team Merlyn for 2022



HISTORIC FF1600

Samuel Harrison will drive for Classic Team Merlyn next season in the Historic Formula Ford Championship.

The 17-year-old showcased his talent at last month's Walter Hayes Trophy event, winning the Historic (pre-1982) final

decided in a photo finish.

Harrison's tenacity in family-owned Elden Mk8 and Royale in Historic and Classic FF1600 over the past two seasons has marked him out, and his fight with Cam Jackson at Cadwell Park also opened eyes.

"I could see that Samuel had a lot of natural talent,

and felt that in our successful environment he could flourish," said team owner Mike O'Brien.

"Testing couldn't have gone better and, following his WHT win, I'm looking forward to what I expect to be another closely contested HFF season with great optimism."

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CELEBRATING PORSCHE'S WINNING LE MANS HISTORY The 79th Goodwood Members' Meeting next year will feature demonstration runs celebrating Porsche's 956 and 962 models. The former (pictured above) secured Le Mans 24 Hours victories between 1982 and 1985 with drivers such as Derek Bell, Jacky Ickx and Henri Pescarolo, while the latter continued Porsche's winning ways in 1986 and 1987 during the Group C era. Two runs will take place at the event on 9-10 April, one each day, with around 20 models invited to take part. Further demonstrations at the meeting are due to be announced in due course. **Photograph by Motorsport Images**

Ex-Hughes MGF to return to action

MG COCKSHOOT CUP

The MGF Cup's most successful car will return to racing action in the MG Car Club's Cockshoot Cup next year.

The championship-winning chassis from 1998-99 has been added to the stable of Mark Wright and Steve Elliott, joining their growing fleet of machinery from the manufacturer-backed series, which supported British Formula 3 and British GT from 1998 to 2000.

The Team Firstair car won the inaugural championship in the hands of James Rhodes, while Warren Hughes took it to the 1999 crown before joining the MG Le Mans and British Touring Car Championship programmes.



It was then campaigned successfully in TF form by Malcolm Gammons and Andrew Radford in the MG Trophy.

"We're going to take it back to its '99 spec," said Elliott. "The engine has already been rebuilt by Janspeed, who built them in period. When it comes

out it will be back in its Firstair Chelsea Football Club [livery], absolutely as it was in '99, which I think is important."

The car is earmarked for a track return at Silverstone's MG Live event next June, where it is set to be piloted by a guest driver.

MARK PAULSON

SPA OUTING PLANNED FOR NEW PRAGA CUP

PRAGA

The inaugural Praga Cup campaign is set to feature a non-championship round at Spa next July.

The series has been created following the successful running of a Praga class within the Britcar Endurance series this season, and the Czech manufacturer will now run standalone grids for the R1 prototypes in collaboration with Britcar. Six rounds are set to form the championship, starting at Silverstone in March, with the Spa trip planned for the summer. Other rounds will be held at Oulton Park, Snetterton and Donington Park.

Praga's UK managing director Mark Harrison explained that the visit to Belgium was organised because Praga has recently appointed a Benelux dealer and "everybody loves Spa".

"The R1 has done well at Spa in the past," he added, pointing out that Spa is a similar distance to Oulton for some southern-based competitors.

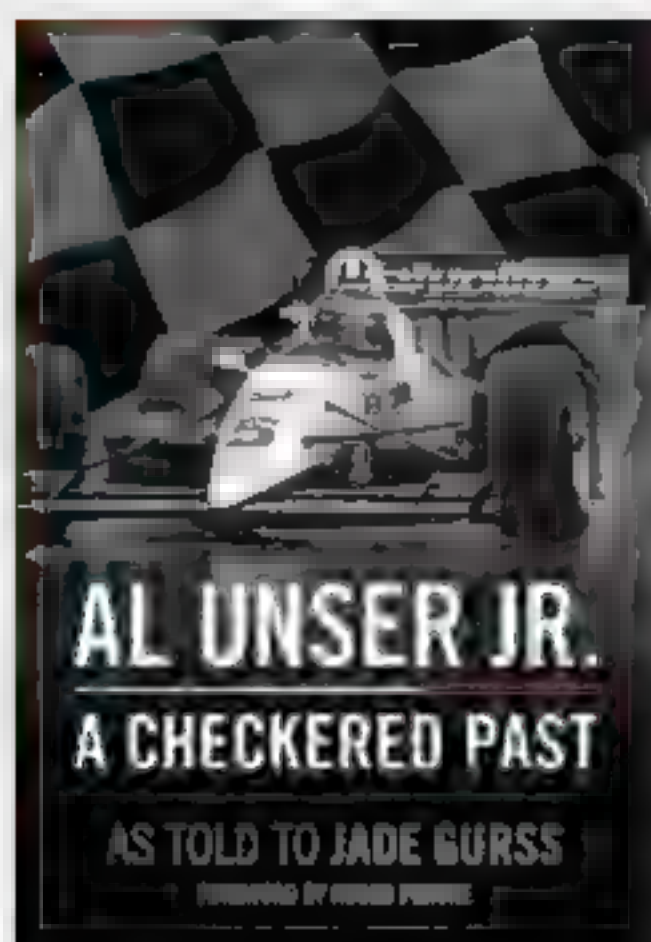
Praga has committed to at least 16 cars being on the grid next year, and Harrison is working to ensure that the majority are run by teams rather than the factory. He has been encouraged by the amount of interest in the new category. "We had a fantastic time at MotorsportDays LIVE and had 38 people drive the car and did a couple of test days after that," he said.

Three teams have been officially confirmed to be taking part so far: Shane Kelly's University of Wolverhampton Racing, Tim Gray Motorsport, and the newly formed Idola Motorsport squad.

STEPHEN LICKORISH



A REDEMPTION STILL IN PROGRESS



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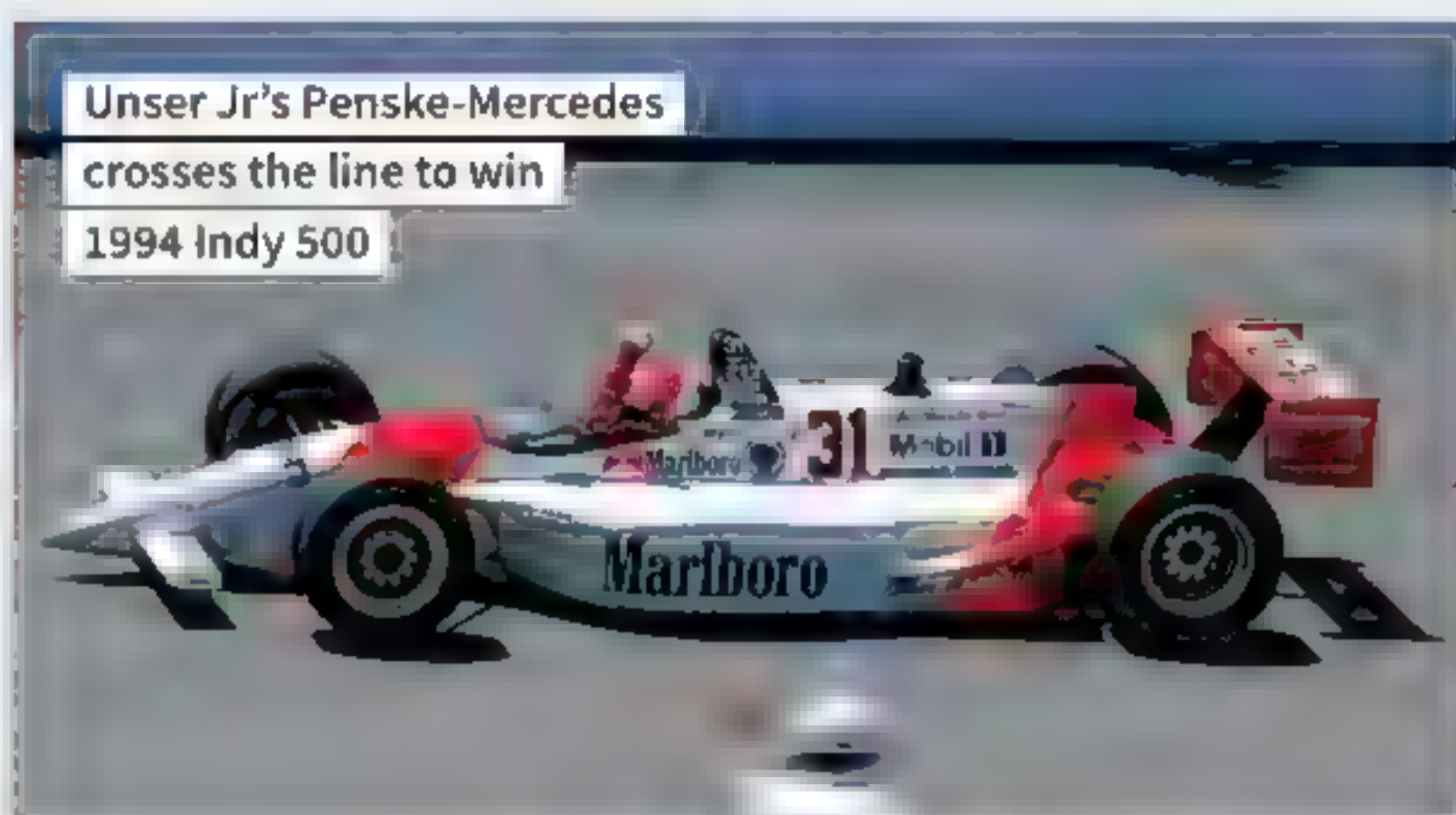
"Little Al wins, by just a few tenths of a second!" The late Bob Jenkins's immortalised words as Al Unser Jr crossed the yard of bricks to win the 1992 Indianapolis 500 are seared in the minds of Indycar fans of all ages.

The second-generation star, son of the late Al Unser Sr, who died last week, went on to become a two-time Indy 500 winner on his way to a second Indycar title in 1994, adding the gloss to a CV that already counted two Daytona 24 Hours victories and two International Race of Champions crowns.

But for all of his on-track achievements, which earned him million-dollar contracts, Unser's personal life was one of turmoil that contributed to his downfall. Drug dependence, repeated relapses into alcoholism and multiple arrests led to the collapse of two marriages and him contemplating suicide on his 50th birthday. It all makes the title of his recently released book, *A Checkered Past*, somehow fitting.

Written with Jade Gurss, who has previously penned books on Penske's 1994 Indy 500 'Beast' engine and the life of the late John Andretti, Unser's memoir covers all the stories you'd expect from his racing career. Why he turned down Bernie Ecclestone for a Brabham F1 seat in 1986, and why he didn't follow through with his initial plan of flipping the bird at Emerson Fittipaldi following their 1989 Indy 500-deciding clash for example. But it also doesn't shy away from the painful memories as his life spiralled out of control into "crazy benders" that lasted for days at a time, "drinking so much that I was killing myself".

By his own admission, his story "can be seen as a tragedy" and he laments frequently all that he lost from being "too ashamed" to ask those around him for help – either with his finances because he "didn't have any confidence outside of my little box", or his addictions.



Unser Jr's Penske-Mercedes
 crosses the line to win
 1994 Indy 500



Unser rues not opening up
 to 'The Captain' sooner

MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Unser smoked marijuana for most of his career – he'd got into the habit of calming himself with the drug after his sister's death in 1983 – and frequently used cocaine.

"Whether things were great or awful, I reacted the same way," he says. "I was either celebrating my success or numbing my losses."

He maintains that for most of his career, there was "still a line between the two Al Juniors", and that he was still putting in good drives despite Team Penske's late 1990s decline as its Goodyear tyres and Mercedes engines were surpassed by Firestone and Honda respectively. But, he concedes, "I was abusing so many substances, I don't know if I was sober enough to judge".

Roger Penske, his team owner from 1994 to 1999 and who writes the book's foreword, was the last person Unser wanted to know the extent of his troubles. With hindsight, he reckons "I might have gotten the help I needed to kick all of it" if he'd approached 'The Captain' sooner.

The book, Unser acknowledges, was good therapy for him after years of attending AA meetings – these proved little help as he was frequently recognised –



Unser Jr's super-close 1992 Indy 500 triumph is now the stuff of US racing legend

and repeated visits to rehab, his first stay treated by his then-sponsor as “a damn publicity stunt”.

“I want to share my life with honesty and candour, with all the laughter and tears included,” he says in the introduction. The result is an engrossing read that ends on a positive note as Unser explains how his reaffirmed faith has made him better equipped to face adversity head on, rather than feel a need to “numb myself into oblivion” as he did following Penske’s failure to qualify for the 1995 Indy 500.

Given his family’s esteemed racing background, with father Unser Sr and uncle Bobby Unser counting seven Indy 500 wins between them, Al Jr was always likely to end up in the family business. The name helped, but his talent spoke for itself — after learning the ropes in sprint cars, he won back-to-back titles in Formula Super Vee and Can-Am before, in his third Indycar season, challenging his dad for the Indycar title with the underdog Doug Shierson Racing team in 1985.

A first title arrived in 1990 with Galles-Kraco Racing, before he got the call from Penske he’d been dreaming of. But after a strong start, his personal problems overtook him, and Indy 1995 marked a significant turning point. He’d already missed important tests earlier that year, which made “clear my drug use was beginning to infringe on my career”, and victory at Long Beach staved off his friends’ planned intervention. But after Indy, the previously unshakeable belief in his ability was rocked and resulted in his mental stability “crumbling”.

He comments on his “stupid and naive” decision-making during that time almost as if it was another person. And readers will get the impression that Unser today is indeed a man changed by his experiences, even if he sees his redemption as still a work in progress. He hopes that his story will help others facing similar demons — and should it do so, it would be no less an achievement in climbing back from rock bottom than having his face appear twice on the Borg Warner Trophy.

JAMES NEWBOLD



[autosport.com/podcast](https://www.autosport.com/podcast)



TEL/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Max Verstappen clinched the 2021 F1 world championship in dramatic fashion after a last-lap pass on Lewis Hamilton won him the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Recapping all of the action and fallout from Abu Dhabi, Ariana Bravo is joined by Luke Smith (F1 Reporter, Autosport) and Jess McFadyen (Director of Digital Strategy, Motorsport Network) for the latest edition of the Autosport podcast.

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FROM THE ARCHIVE

Jochen Rindt (in civvies) strolls through the makeshift Montjuich Park paddock as the Team Lotus mechanics work on his and Graham Hill's 49B machines ahead of the 1969

Spanish Grand Prix. The Austrian qualified in pole position, with his team-mate third on the grid, but the race was a disaster as both cars crashed heavily at the same point on the circuit after their rear-wing

supports collapsed – first Hill, then 11 laps later Rindt, who hit the wrecked #1 Lotus before overturning. This brought safety concerns over the high wings to a head, and they were banned for the next race in Monaco.

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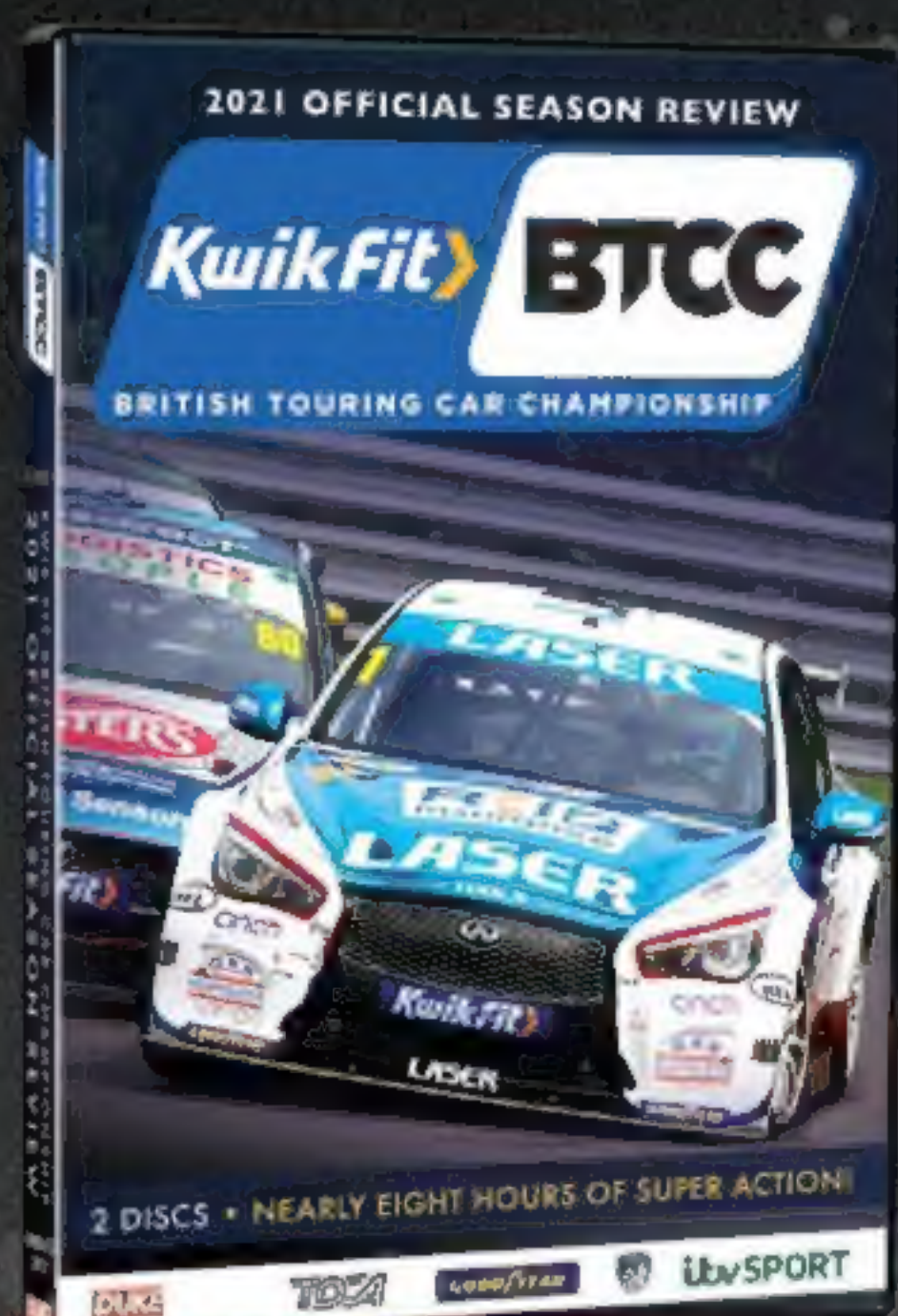
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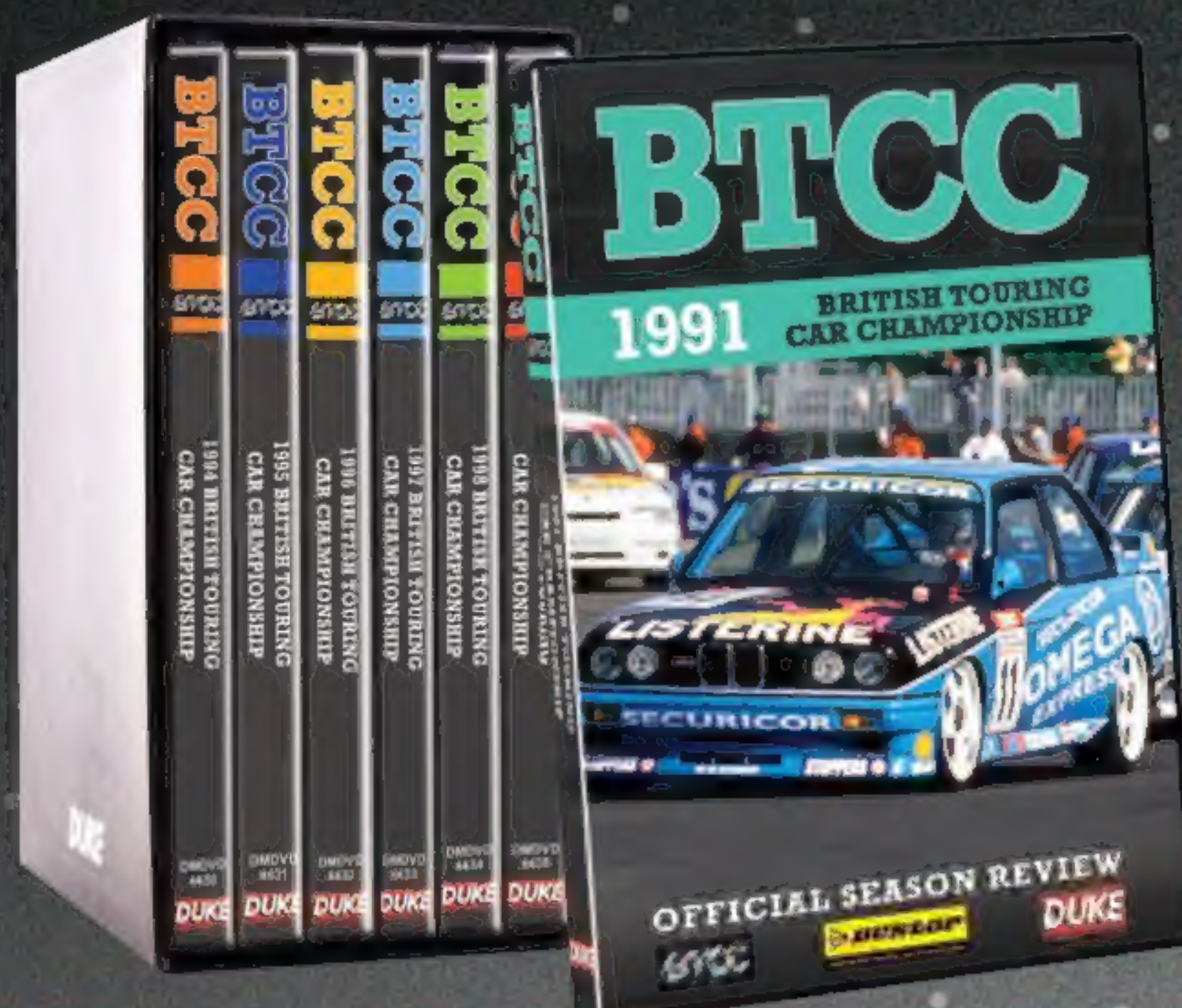
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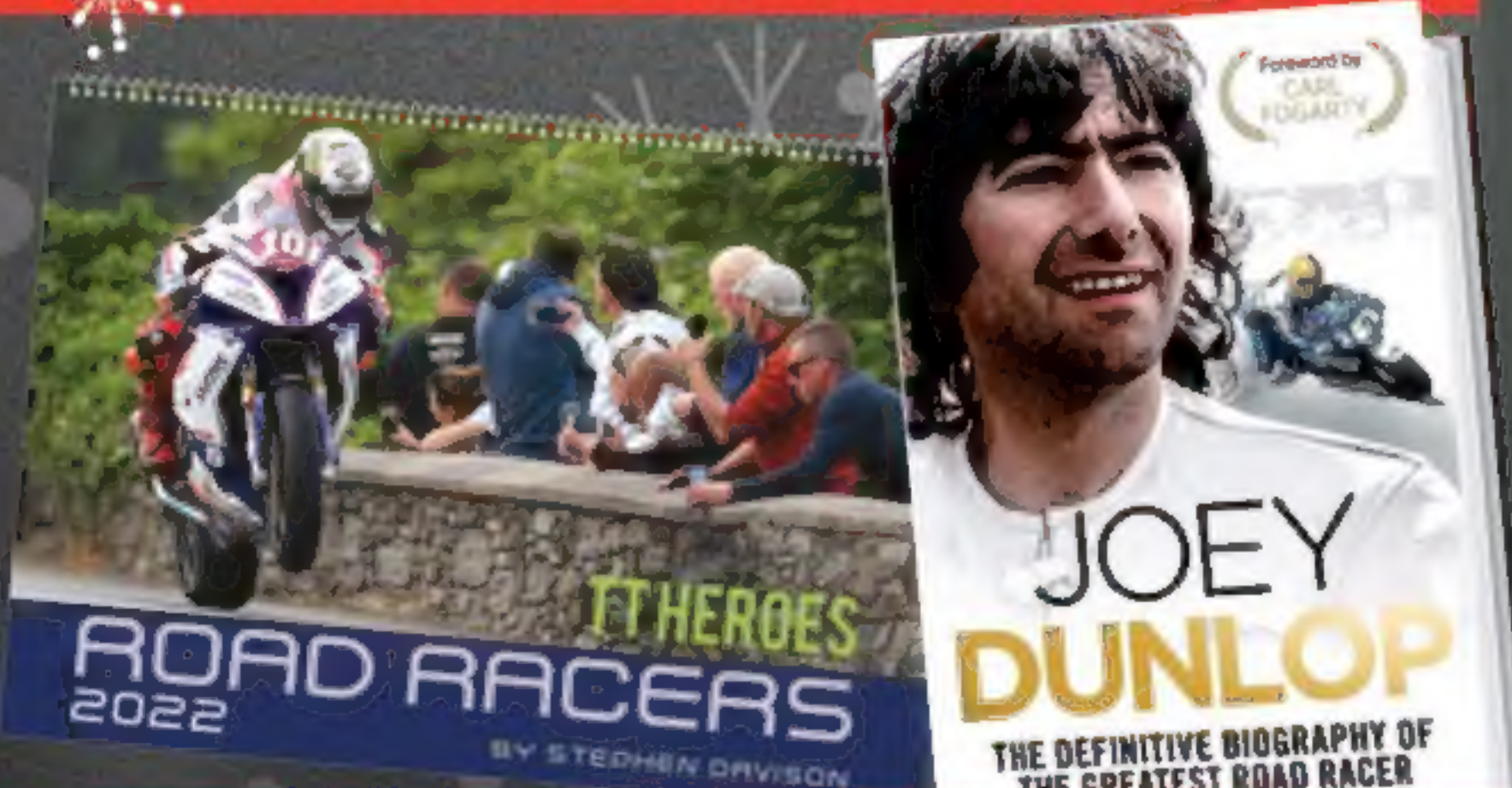
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